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The Pacific Journal of Theology

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Contents

Editorial

by Tessa Mackenzie 1

Gender Based Violence in the Pacific

by Dr. Jenny Te Paa Daniel 3

Rethinking Mission and Theology in the Pacific

by Dr. Sr. Malia Keiti Ann Kanongata'a 21

Same Sex Marriage

by Rev. Dr. Afereti Uili 40

Towards a Unifying Principle for the Bible: A Prolegomena on Pacific Hermeneutics

by Rev. Dr. Ma'afu Palu 55

Book Review:

From Local Church to Bride of Christ - The Nuptial Itinerary of the Apocalypse

Author: Felise Tavo

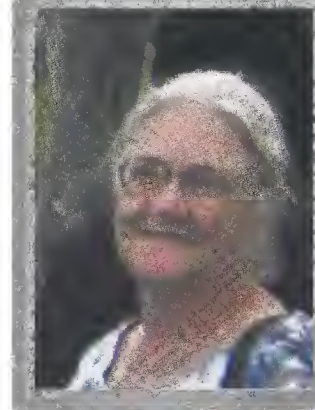
Reviewed by: Rev. Dr. Donal McIlraith 71

The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools is deeply grateful to:

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Editorial



In this Issue of the Journal we are very happy to welcome back Lora Gallagher as illustrator for some of the articles. In the early 1990s Lora was in Fiji and provided illustrations for the Journal. In those early years of the Journal there was also a number of island artists who contributed to the Journal but the Editorial Board has been unsuccessful in recent years in attracting illustrators. It was through a chance meeting with Lora last year that we have reconnected with Lora and we welcome her contributions in hopes that she will inspire others to join her.

Tessa Mackenzie
Tessa Mackenzie is currently Chairperson of the Board of the Pacific Journal of Theology - a service she has voluntarily granted to SPATS for more than twenty years and still continues to do.

Over the past 10 years the three ecumenical bodies, Pacific Conference of Churches, the Pacific Theological College and SPATS have been increasingly aware of the need for a theology relevant for the issues facing our pacific island peoples. There have been writings, conferences, and discussions providing a rich collection of theological reflections, especially from the Mission Conference in Viwa

(2010) and the Re-thinking Hermeneutics Conference in Namoli (2011). In December 2013 a planning conference to establish a Commission on Mission and Theology was held in Vanuatu. In this Issue we publish three presentations from that conference, each of which challenged the planners to re-think theology in the oceanic environment.

Sister Keiti Ann Kanongata'a calls for the Mission of God to be revisited and firmly re-birthed from within the Pacific community. She asks that the Church understand itself as sent into the world to respond to the issues, economic, social and political, bearing witness to the intentions of God, being the 'human face of God', rather than being concerned with numbers and building the church.

Dr Jenny Te Paa Daniel addresses the issue of gender based physical and spiritual violence and the effects on all involved with some strong words. She challenges the Church to take up the rich resources in the Biblical texts and to initiate public study and discussion. She asks for outdated ideas that affect behaviour in both Church and culture to be confronted with a theological voice.

Rev Dr Afereti Uili aims to create a conversation on same-sex marriage and he provides some unusual insights into the Biblical texts and rightly raises the question of justice and the need to admit the limitations of our human understanding.

The articles in this issue of the Journal are important material for discussion in our theological colleges as well as among the leaders of the Churches and among our people. The failure of the Church to face up to these and other pressing issues of justice needs to be addressed. It is time to break the culture of silence that is preventing the Church from being the 'human face of God' in the Pacific islands.

Also in this Issue of the Journal we reprint Rev. Dr Ma'afu Palu's article that was originally published in Issue 48 (2012) without the Endnotes. We apologise to Dr Palu and to our readers for this omission.



*The following three consecutive articles were presented as
Supplementary Papers to the
Commission on Mission and Theology
in December, 2013*

Gender Based Violence in the Pacific

*E tewhanau a te Ariki, tenakoutoukatoa. Tenahokikoutou e paenei i
runga i tearoha a to tatou Matuanui i terangi.*

We are gathered here as God's people in beautiful Vanuatu and are being cared for so generously by our truly wonderful hosts to whom it is right for me as your sister in Christ to continue to offer very sincere thanks and praise.

We are gathered here however not simply to delight in the unique beauty of this wonderful island nation. We gather to do God's work, to witness to our faith, to be as Christian disciples ever willing to hunger and thirst for righteousness, indeed even to be persecuted for righteousness sake.

I am grateful and I am humbled beyond measure for your invitation to be with you on this day. I am especially grateful to you all for insisting that the issue of gender based violence stays on the agenda until the day when no longer will women



**Dr. Jenny Te Paa
Daniel**

Te Paa-Daniel is the former aborangi, or principal, of Te Rau Kahikatea, a constituent of the College of St. John the Evangelist in Auckland, New Zealand. She is the first lay, indigenous, and single woman ever to be appointed as head of an Anglican theological college throughout the Anglican Communion. Te Paa-Daniel was the first Maori person to complete an academic degree in theology.

and girls in particular, ever again need fear being harmed simply because we were blessed by God to be created as female.

It has actually never ever made sense to me just how come at least half of those whom God created and then declared to be not just good, but very good, could then be *re-declared* only this time not by God but by mere mortal man, to actually be *not so good* and then down through the ages be treated accordingly as less fully human, less fully worthy, less fully acceptable.

Now for those of you wanting to assert Biblical arguments in favour of the subordination of women, I will enthusiastically debate the matter with you any time! Later in this paper I will indeed be addressing some of the problems arising for women as a direct result of centuries of being regarded as the *objects* of Biblical interpretation rather than as the active *subjects*. For now let me remind us that Biblical women were and still are, to be understood as contributors, initiators, evangelists, friends, leaders, betrayers, seducers, warriors, politicians, business leaders, victims and survivors – an incomplete list but no less a far more accurate portrayal of real Biblical women!

For now though let me just say this. I do not believe for a moment that God ever intended for 50% of his perfectly created humanity to be at any moment, deprived of fullness of life or lifelong opportunity for flourishing.

Rather my Christian understanding is that God intends we are through our baptism drawn into the sacred circle of trust which ultimately requires each one of us to protect, sustain and nurture all of God's human creation.

My understanding for this universal commission to care for all is based quite simply on my apprehension of the greatest commandment of all which is, that we are *to love God as we are loved with all our hearts and all our minds and we are to love all of our neighbours as ourselves.*

Try as I might I see nothing here in Matthew's Gospel authorising patriarchy, authorising male domination, authorising male control, abuse, violence . . . and yet as we are so unavoidably familiar, gender based violence (*which has its roots*

in all of these things) is here and now in our time and in all of our communities sickeningly pervasive.

How come God instructs us to love and we feel free to choose to act in the exact opposite way?

Now just before I go on, I want for just a moment to clarify a couple of things in case any of you begin to remonstrate with me as so often occurs in gatherings such as this.

Firstly, I am speaking here and now as an indigenous laywoman of faith who is unapologetically committed to the Biblical concept that women and girls are indeed *'far more precious than jewels'*. Now this does not mean I consider men to be any less precious and nor indeed does it mean that I am blind to the fact that men too are victims of gender violence inflicted upon them by women and that women too, are eminently capable of harming one another.

All that it means is that here and now what I am addressing is the particular evil of gendered violence inflicted by men and boys against women and girls across our beloved South Pacific/Oceania region.

Certainly it would do no harm at some point for there to be some genuine consideration of the destructive effects of gender violence upon men and boys but this is not such a time.

Secondly, I want to make clear that even as I am unequivocal in condemning men who both participate in and initiate gender based violence, I am nonetheless seeing them too as being equally humanly debased by their actions. There are no winners – all are losers who offend against God's perfectly created humanity. There are only victims and offenders and God grieves mightily for both.

Thirdly, I want also to make clear that my apprehension of gender based violence for the purposes of our gathering here as church leaders must encompass not only the brutal physically harmful manifestations of gender based physical violence but also the less visible and yet equally brutalizing

psychological manifestations of gender based spiritual violence. For it is surely in harming the unseen spirit of God's creation that an equally grievous sin is committed?

Fourthly, I want to be very clear that while I yearn for the day when we can speak as Christian leaders into the public square on the issue of gender based violence from a morally and theologically credible position, this is most definitely not yet that time. For such is the extent of our own internal gendered structural inequalities, indeed such is the indelible stain of actual and potential for violence and abuse within our own ecclesial households that we are I believe, completely unable to withstand the oft levelled accusation that the Church itself is a bastion of protection for the perpetrators of gender based violence within its own household. So too through its determinedly patriarchal teachings does the Church continue to provide safe psychological haven for all forms of secular sexism, yet another precursor to gender based violence.

There is much to do by way of first achieving our own internal redemption before we can be truly credible witnesses beyond the denominational silos we seem so incurably condemned to maintain. In the meantime I suggest it would be well for us to remain appropriately humble in our determinations to 'fix' what lies beyond the ecclesial frontier, when clearly our own household is in such desperate need of cleansing, healing and transforming if ever it is to be a credibly, visibly welcoming and nurturing place for all, irrespective of any form of humanly constructed identity based difference.

Well hopefully then after laying out these personal caveats you will have some appreciation of why I now say what I feel I must.

For all Christians, but especially for those of us from the South Pacific region, gender based violence is one of the most disturbing and endemic human evils abroad in all of our communities, in all of our villages, in all of our neighbourhoods.

To our collective shame it is prime among the contemporary evils we as South Pacific Christians continue so often to choose not to notice, or if we do, we

first react by either minimising or worse setting about justifying its unavoidable 'necessity'. No wonder we are unforgivably way behind our secular sisters and brothers in organising ourselves to act against gender based violence.

Not knowing what to do or where to start, or pausing to wonder is it either safe, or is it even my responsibility to act is no defence. These hesitations are all nothing more than pathetic unconscionable excuses. Remember evil can only flourish when good people stand by and say and do nothing.

Whenever we hesitate in order to try and minimise or deny that there even is a problem, or whenever we crudely deflect gender based violence by suggesting that some women either **need** beating, or **deserve** to be raped, or that somehow they 'asked for it'; indeed whenever we assert that gender based violence is a **private matter** between spouses or parents and their children, then I believe we ourselves surely become inexcusably complicit in perpetuating deep and enduring harm to the bodies, the minds and the spirits of too many beautiful, innocent and vulnerable women and girls. By our inaction, the evil continues unabated, unchecked, unnamed.

So what then are we now to do to rid our precious South Pacific paradise of this destructive, disfiguring, deadly evil?

Surely I do not need to reiterate the disproportionate statistics, the narratives of terror, of disfigurement, of death and serious injury, of destroyed family, village and community life, of lifelong emotional devastation, of incalculable spiritual harm, all of which are inevitably the end result for those subjected to any and all forms of gender based violence.

Surely we are all aware of how disgraceful the statistics on all forms of gender based violence are for the entire Polynesian, Melanesian, Micronesian region. As strong Christian island nations we ought be ashamed of our appalling records of abuse and violence against our own women and girls, remembering always that statistics on violence are always notoriously under-reported and so what we are officially told is inevitably but a mere minimum indicator of the true levels of violence actually occurring.

As Church leaders it is unforgivable that to date we have not taken the lead in consistently publicly condemning *and* acting against this destructive evil abroad in our communities.

For example, when was the last time you initiated public conversation with your parish, your class, your family, your clergy gatherings about gender based violence? When was the last time you either read or preached on Samuel 2:13 in Church? For here in the story of the violent rape of Tamar by David's son Amnon are all the elements of debased male thinking and behaving toward an innocent woman. The story deals in great detail with the way in which the entire community around both Tamar and Amnon are grievously affected. What rich material there is here in this one short and horrific Bible story for an extended Bible Study on gender based violence? So why do we so studiously avoid it? It depicts reality then and now – it disgusts us, it makes us fearful as women, it makes most men deeply uncomfortable, it negatively affects our relationships with one another – why then do we not use stories such as this to truly deeply understand why and how such wicked behaviour occurs in order that we might begin working toward ensuring the horror might now end?

This word patriarchy always gets a mention but never an extended conversation! What is it, is it real in our beloved church and what does it really mean?

Well the dictionary meaning is twofold. First it refers to a system in which the father or the eldest male is head of the family and descent is traced through the males and secondly it refers to any system in which men hold power and women are excluded from it.

Since the time of the patriarchs – the so-called 'fathers' of our Church, this has been the essential philosophical working apparatus of each one of our precious denominational churches (*where the men hold power and women are 'traditionally' excluded from it*). This is why and how women have been systematically excluded from leadership across the spectrum of the activities at the heart of mission. Here and now in the 21st century I am so wanting to believe that there is no-one here present who considers patriarchy to be any longer an acceptable organising framework for those entrusted to leadership roles within the Church.



Patriarchy is then literally our man made system for devaluing the human worth of women and girls – those same women and girls whom God created equally in God’s image and likeness?

Patriarchy began as no more than an uncontested traditional ‘*idea*’ that women and girls are weaker, more vulnerable, less capable and therefore need stronger more aggressive warrior men to lead and protect them. That idea soon became an ideology or an entire body of ideas assumed to be the truth. This ideology has over the centuries been translated into attitudes, which are in turn used to determine and reinforce the behaviours, needed to keep women in our rightfully subordinated place.

I say ideological with impunity because there is surely nothing at all *theological* about an idea, which informs and shapes an attitude which leads ultimately to harmful and abusive behaviour. There is certainly nothing theological in the habitually articulated understanding that women or girls might just *deserve* to be physically or emotionally harmed, that they might actually *need* to be physically or emotionally harmed.

How can any of us rest easy knowing that patriarchy is unquestionably unjust? How can any of us rest easy knowing that the theological arguments used to justify patriarchy are unsustainable?

How is it that we as Christian leaders to the largest extent (*even knowing the causes of gender based violence*), dare still to remain either impassive or indifferent? Knowing and not acting makes us utterly complicit in the known daily suffering of those in our midst who are our wives, our mothers and sisters, our grandmothers, our daughters, our precious *mokopuna* or granddaughters when we know that the system of patriarchy is a root cause of that suffering?

We know that the ‘*idea*’ and thus the understanding of patriarchy (*and it is just that – it is an idea and not a God given prescription*) is what has formed the attitudes held by both men and women about the proper place for women in the church and in society and those attitudes are what in turn determine the behaviours needed to uphold patriarchy or unjust male dominance.



*Remember it is the **idea**, which forms the **attitude**, which in turn informs and impels the resultant **behaviour**. Keep those three words in your mind – I for Idea, A for Attitude and B for Behaviour.*

Now before rushing to construct a false binary between ideology and theology let me hasten to add that I consider that perhaps the most significant obstacle to ridding our precious Pacific communities of the evil of gender based violence is: not only our questionable Biblical understandings about women and our rightful worth before God but also our own adamant and often aggressive culturally based refusal to interrogate those traditional '*ideas*' we have each been raised with about women's 'proper' roles in our respective South Pacific/Oceania island communities.

So if the '*ideas*' are problematic then all that follows will also be problematic as well. So let's look for a moment at just where the combination of '*ideas*' to which I am referring comes from?

In every single Pacific nation I have thus far been privileged to visit (*and endorsed by the first-hand accounts of my beloved husband who has visited virtually every single one of the Pacific Islands in his capacity as a senior medical doctor*), I know now that the populist understanding, about the rightful 'proper' place and role of women in virtually all of our island societies has been and continues to be informed and shaped by two primary institutional influences, those of church and tribe. Both powerfully hierarchical, both staunchly patriarchal, both unerringly self-protective and thus deeply resistant to change.

Firstly then, the Church. Even a cursory survey of the missionary legacy will soon reveal a propensity for largely uncritical and often frighteningly punitive Biblical theology. While much has changed in the 21st century, the 'ideological' core of theological '*ideas*' at the heart of missionary theology still resonates in all of our communities.

Women and girls were to be seen (*as long as they were completely covered up!*), they were to remain silent in church (*except to sing so exquisitely*), they were to be completely subservient to the Priest, to their fathers and subsequently to

their husbands. Thus the historically received Biblically reinforced *patriarchally* informed 'idea' that women were to be modest, silent, obedient and dutiful was readily translated into an attitude of passivity and learned helplessness on the part of women and of jubilant aggression and opportunistic dominance on the part of male church leaders.

I know this is somewhat of a sweeping broad generalisation and I leave it open to challenge. All I ask however is that you consider honestly the extent to which these out-dated conservative views on the 'proper' role of women are still present in your Church. In addition by way of a gender audit you might ask any one of the following questions. Are women genuinely free to choose or to be chosen for all forms of leadership in your Church? Are there genuine pathways to leadership for younger women to aspire to? Do you really believe that just increasing the numbers of women in leadership will give effect to greater justice for women? Are your women leaders actually bad male leaders in disguise?

The last two questions are especially important. It is my view that quantitative change alone is just cynical – real change occurs when those with the qualities for leadership are enabled and anointed regardless of their gender and never because of it.

Secondly, the tribe. Even a cursory survey of our unique tribal histories and their direct impact upon our contemporary reality will soon reveal a propensity for blind obedience to largely uncritical and sometimes frighteningly punitive tribal lore. Women and children (*unless of rangatira or Ariki status*) are to be seen as 'belonging' by whakapapa to either their father, brother or husband), they are to remain silent in tribal forums (*again unless they carry rangatira or Ariki status*), they are subservient to the village chief and or elders and for all public social interaction they require the prior approval of either their father, brother or husband. Thus the culturally received and regularly reinforced idea that tribal women are to be modest, silent, obedient and dutiful, that we need 'protecting', has also historically been translated into an attitude of passivity and learned helplessness on the part of women and of jubilant aggression and opportunistic dominance on the part of men and boys.

Now because many Pacific Islands share very similar histories where leading male missionaries came hand in hand with leading male colonisers who were in turn protected and accommodated by leading male tribal leaders then what has occurred down to our time today is an uncritical merging and integrating of all of these historically constructed ideas from the twin frontiers of Church and tribe.

More often than not the two have been perversely enfolded one into another resulting in deeply flawed conservative theology propping up deeply sexist cultural claims or vice versa. Certainly it has enabled the unquestioned ongoing dominance of male leadership in both spheres. It is my contention that this is still a fairly accurate summation of the status quo.

And it is this largely unchallenged status quo, which is daily proving quite literally devastatingly harmful if not fatal for far too many women and girls in our region.

So my friends and colleagues as church leaders and leading theological educators of the Pacific isn't it about time we raised a critical and courageous voice of Gospel based critique against the taken for granted traditions which uphold the still dominant and still grossly unjust I (Ideas) = A (Attitude) = B (Behaviour) paradigm?

In my now sixty short years on this earth and in the Pacific neighbourhood I cannot recall hearing, or witnessing anything substantial let alone intentional in my Church, which is deeply, respectfully theologically articulate about the roles, rights and responsibilities of women and girls. Oh sure we pay perfunctory attention to Mother's Day, International Women's Day, Women's Suffrage, various Saints' Days and so on but these are constructed as one off, specific purpose and essentially domesticated *celebratory* events whereas what is needed is something far more radically disruptive, far more transformative, far more enduring! After all, I want every day to be both mother's and father's day, — I want a world in which there is no need to celebrate and recall incremental access to basic human rights for one half of God's human creation, I want a world where democracy is a taken for granted. I don't want things to stay as

they are – I have seven stunningly beautiful and highly intelligent and capable granddaughters whose lives I will not tolerate ever being blighted by sexism or patriarchy!

Besides, what is first needed among us as God's people is not celebration but lament – lament for women's and girls' lives lost, women's and girls' bodies ravaged, women's and girls' spirits crushed. Lament for all that human potential, all that contribution being limited or lost. Lament for the perpetrators of gender based violence, lament for our collective failure to honour indeed for our failure to love all of God's created humanity, all of our neighbours as we ourselves are loved by God.

Therefore as a starting point I suggest we as church leaders must surely now take very seriously the urgent need to critique together the historically established unholy power laden alliance between church and culture.

And before any of you become completely outraged at what I am suggesting let me hasten to add that I am not advocating for either ecclesial or cultural genocide but what I am insisting upon is that we commit together to either dismantling or at very least radically modifying those *ideas, attitudes and behaviours*, masquerading as either cultural or ecclesial traditions *that are in any way harmful to women and girls*.

Please notice I am only speaking here of those so-called traditions that are harmful, that degrade or devalue the humanity of women and girls. I am not speaking of those myriad God given life giving, life sustaining aspects of all of our cultural traditions – for in these positive aspects are indeed the gifts of God for all the people of God.

Let me give two quick examples of the traditions that harm and that must be either dismantled or transformed; one cultural and one ecclesial.

1. Among many Maori there has been a long held tradition that women should never speak on *Marae* during formal occasions such as *powhiri* or the public

ritual of encounter between home tribe and visiting tribe. Instead women are to be relegated to the back rows of the ritualised exchange of pleasantries and of challenge.

The rationale or *idea* behind this prohibition is that women as bearers of future generations must be protected from any malevolent forces seen and unseen which can be unleashed during such encounters.

Now on the surface of this *idea* is a sentiment, that appears as noble, protective, even sensible. Back in our pre-Christian ferociously warrior days I think the idea had real merit. But when the idea is subjected to 21st century closer scrutiny it can very quickly be exposed as nothing more than a rhetorical device for excluding Maori women's voices and thus for denying our leadership.

For example, let me deconstruct just a little that argument that Maori women need '*protecting*' and let me place my argument firmly within the context of contemporary Maori life in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Can I just quote you the latest police statistics I have been able to access. They are from 2008, just five years ago. The figures show that even then, 49% of Maori women are abused by their life partner (*the majority of whom are Maori*) at some time in their life, seven times more young Maori women and four times more young Maori children are hospitalised as a result of assault than dominant *Pakeha* women and children. Half of all children killed by caregivers including parents in New Zealand are Maori. We are just 15% of the total population.

My question to the so-called *traditional idea* that Maori women need protecting is, '*protecting from whom*' because it would seem to me that statistically speaking those who pose the greatest risk to Maori women are Maori men. Why then would I want to uncritically retain a so-called sacred tradition, which is clearly unable to be upheld as life giving or life sustaining?

2. In all Pacific churches there has been a long held tradition that women are either not permitted at all (*Catholics*) or are viewed as not being capable or

worthy or particularly suited to the rigorous demands of ministry leadership (*all Protestants*). Again the rationale or idea behind this prohibition is variously Biblically advanced. You all know the one about Jesus choosing only men as his disciples, and how therefore it is clear that Jesus only ever intended for men to be leaders.

Again on the surface of this 'idea', it would seem plausible. Certainly if I hadn't had the incalculable privilege of studying theology then I too like the vast majority of our good and faithful communities of faith might still believe the Priests of our childhoods all of whom insisted women and girls were always to be seen but never genuinely heard.

But you see we all know now that Biblical interpretation is a field wide open. No longer is it the sole preserve of those able and determined to maintain their material and spiritual advantages as leaders in the Church. And here I think especially of the High Priests around at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. I think of their blatant cowardly self-preservation at any cost and then sadly I think of too many of those currently entrusted leadership in all of our churches.

Now about these male disciples or the 'chosen ones'. A couple of alternative thoughts occur. Firstly I agree that Jesus did indeed 'call' the men. But was that because they needed calling? I say this because on so many occasions it is obvious that the disciples didn't quite ever really get what Jesus was on about? Conversely we do know that by the time the male disciples were officially 'called', so many women had already 'got it' and had already actively responded to Jesus' teaching which in and of itself was a call to radical discipleship.

Just because Jesus lined up the men on one particular occasion and named them does this mean they were the only disciples? What about the seventy unnamed who were also commissioned and how do we know they weren't all women? What about the Samaritan woman who was the first evangelist and is what she did not discipleship? What about Mary, sister of Martha? Was she not doing what obedient disciples do to learn from their teachers? What about Mary Magdalene and what about the women at the tomb whom Jesus instructed to go tell the disciples what they had seen?

All of this surely calls the assertion that Jesus only called men to be disciples into serious question?

Friends, we are all leaders and leaders as teachers are to *lead* in the search always for knowledge, which helps us create societies, which are good and fair and just. We are especially commissioned because of our faith to do just that, so when things are not good or fair or just, such as when gender based violence is at pandemic levels, then surely we are obligated to act.

I am suggesting two immediate responses that each one of us here present undertakes to do.

The first is the longer-term educative project. This is one to systematically redress, reframe and refocus *dominant Ideas, dominant Attitudes, dominant Behaviour*. I want to suggest three alternative I, A, B. words to help with that work.

First the old I word – ideas. Old ideas or ideas being articulated and upheld as sacrosanct traditions and which are the basis of negative stereotyping, of putdown, of exclusion, devaluing, exploitation, ridicule must be opened to new and insight filled critical inquiry. This includes both the church and the tribal frontiers of knowledge, which influence our lives and the lives of those among whom we live. It isn't easy naming unjust traditions, let alone exposing the root causes of violence.

Invoking internal cultural critique will not make you popular but allowing unkind gender based cultural claims to remain un-interrogated will not make you credibly Christian either.

I then is for *insight filled inquiry*. In case you are concerned about whose insight, then the answer is, 'that of Jesus, of course!' When critiquing gender based cultural claims first simply ask is it kind, is it merciful, is it just?

Second, the old A word – attitude. There is nothing wrong with having attitude. Jesus certainly did and he made it clear wherever he went and whomever he was with, that attitude was always to be all about Aroha. Surely then it is exactly

the same for us. Our relationships with others should never be characterised by anger, frustration, rejection or envy. A is for *attitude with aroha* – unconditional, all-inclusive, tender and compassionate.

Third the old B word – behaviour. How often we are reminded it isn't always just about what we say but about what we do. If our behaviour were always intended to be a blessing to others just how perfect that would be! B then is for *blessed behaviour*, which gathers and nurtures all in the vineyard especially those who are the least among us.

We are people of intelligence and of reason and so it follows that we should be modelling with courage and confidence the longer-term disciplines of I, A, B. I implore you all to take seriously your responsibility in this regard. If the root causes of the evil which is gender violence are not being confronted then the appalling statistics, which are a blight on our entire South Pacific/Oceania region, are highly unlikely to ever decrease..

The critical educative work is of course the long term and much more testing commitment. The more immediate action we can all commit to is rather more reactionary and often short term but is still entirely valid.

So please join in the 16 Days of Activism AND do any or all of the following:

- wear your white ribbon more often than your clerical collar and be eager to explain it;
- gather all the global educational resources to do with gender based violence you can lay your hands on and have these available for all in the church to share in;
- start a men's group which takes seriously the need to challenge violent male behaviour;
- preach Samuel 2:13 with justified outrage;
- rail in the local public square about the evil of gender violence;
- join hands with other civic leaders in condemning gender violence;
- hold your Prime Ministers to account for their insincerity in signing the 2012 Pacific Forum Declaration on Gender Equality;

- raise your sons to be gentle and kind and respectful of their sisters, their mothers and grandmothers;
- confront your clerical peers who are bullies or who are in any way violent toward women in the church.

To conclude let me share one short good news story. On May 13 of this year a group of 160 young Kenyan girls, *many of whom had themselves been sexually abused*, undertook an unprecedented legal action against their nation state. They took the government to Court for failing to protect them from gender-based violence.

Kenya like many other nation states in Africa is where a child is raped at least every 30 minutes in the context of rampant HIV and AIDS. Motivated by the most obscene *'idea'* that raping a virgin is a cure for HIV and AIDS and that the younger the virgin the better the chance of cure, men's behaviour ensures that all young Kenyan girls live in absolute fear of the likelihood of being sexually violated. Thus up until May of this year the state and its protective agencies had provably utterly failed to provide adequate protection for women and especially for young girls. With the help of two fine women lawyers the girls sought and won a Supreme Court ruling. The State now has no option but to act to protect its most vulnerable.

In an extraordinary and unprecedented ruling the judge declared that *'By failing to enforce existing defilement laws, the police have contributed to the development of a culture of tolerance for pervasive sexual violence against girl children . . .'*

I thought about this and I thought about us here in Vanuatu as church leaders. And then I drafted an alternative Declaration for your consideration. It is along the same lines as the Kenyan example but adapted to the context of the Church rather than the state.

My draft reads as follows: **'By failing to preach a theology of God's unending and unconditional love and God's desire for justice for all humanity, church leaders are contributing to the continuation of a culture of tolerance for the pervasive evil of gender based violence'.**

What do you think? On reflection I think my draft Declaration is absolutely truthful but I think it could be improved. I think especially that with a generous spirited **insight filled attitude of aroha**, (I, A, B!) we could easily rewrite this draft into something called the **Vanuatu Blessing 2013!**

So how about something like this instead?

'By committing to teach and preach and live into a theology of God's unending and unconditional love and desire for God's justice for all, we as church leaders declare our Churches will no longer tolerate any form of gender based violence at all'. Vanuatu Blessing 2013.

Heoianora – tenakoutoukatoa.

Rethinking Mission and Theology in the Pacific



The Task

The task that I was asked to do was to study the “Briefing Papers” and to produce a guiding document that will assist the new PCC Commission for Mission and Theology (PCC-CMT) in their mandate to articulate “responses to the experiences of church mission and theological reflections”. The “Briefing Papers” mainly those from the Viwa Consultation and the Namoli Conference, present us with many issues and information, dreams, suggestions, resolutions and statements – all related to church issues. Questions are being asked and there are questions that are posed directly to the new Commission. From Viwa, the question is: “What is mission in the context of the Pacific today?” From Namoli they are asking (us) “to rethink mission in the area of a theology of ecology, of a hermeneutics of inclusivity, and a model of partnership of person”.¹

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The Problem

The issues posed by Viwa and Namoli are not new. Our Pacific situation is not a new one for the church. The church has lived through many periods of change and transition, of upheavals, searchings and solutions and even through periods of violent revolution. The church has lived and worked with peoples of varied cultures, values, beliefs and backgrounds. The church is no stranger to controversy, to corruption, division and stifling bureaucracy. Above all, the church is no stranger to renewal and revival. The church has been around for two thousand years and has survived! Through the ages the church has been faithfully offering the one and only solution she has – that of Jesus and His messianic message. Yet, humanity continues to struggle with many of the same problems, as well as with a myriad of new ones. Why? We should ask ourselves where the problem lies. What new responses can we propose or suggest for research? What would be the new vision of our earth that we can offer to our young people of today and tomorrow? What kind of new relationships can we hope for among peoples – between leaders and the grass-root people and between God and us? As a missiologist, the questions that I would be concerned with are: What is the place or purpose of the church in relation to our modern world? What does it mean to say that the church is mission? What is God's mission for us today? And lastly but very importantly, what kind of theology will be our “epiphany star” – guiding us in our search for Jesus in our “Oceanic stable”?

This paper, therefore, is to affirm the necessity of re-thinking mission and theology with regard to the church's missionary vocation and missionary action; the necessity of conceiving them in broad and modern terms, implying thereby that some of our old conceptions of the church's mission have proved too narrow and too inadequate for today.

Rethinking Missio Dei

An enormous change is taking place in the world-wide field of the church's mission. In the past, mission was understood in a variety of ways but primarily about saving souls, planting churches, winning new members, and expansion of the “mother church” both in Christian faith and colonisation. After the First

World War, however, missiologists began to take note of recent developments in biblical and systematic theology. In a paper read at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth ([1932]1957) became one of the first theologians to articulate mission as activity of God Himself. In 1933, Karl Hartenstein in his writing of “In Die Mission als theologisches Problem” expressed a similar conviction. A few years later, at the Tambaram meeting of the International Missionary Conference (IMC) 1938, a statement by the German delegation became another catalyst in the development of a new understanding of mission. The delegation confessed that only “through a creative act of God, His Kingdom will be consummated in the final establishment of a new heaven and new earth”, and “we are convinced that only this eschatological attitude can prevent the church from becoming secularised”.²

The Barthian influence on new mission theology reached a peak at the Willingen Conference of the IMC (1952). It was here that the idea (not the exact term) *missio Dei* first surfaced clearly. Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. This linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation in the development of mission theology. Willingen’s image of mission was mission as participating in the sending of God. “Our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone”.³

In an attempt to flesh out the *missio Dei* concept as developed by the Protestant missiologists led by Karl Barth, the following could be said:

- Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God.
- God is a missionary God.
- It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.



- Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission.
- There is church because there is mission, not vice versa.
- To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.⁴

Since Willingen, the understanding of mission as *missio Dei* has been embraced by virtually all Christian faiths – first by Protestants, but subsequently also by other ecclesial groupings, such as the Eastern Orthodox (1987) and many evangelicals (1989).⁵ It was also endorsed in Catholic theology notably in some of the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity defines missionary activity as “nothing else, and nothing less, than the manifestation of God's plan, its epiphany and realization in the world and in history”.⁶

The *missio Dei* concept went through a wider understanding and some gradual modifications but, all in all, it cannot be denied that the *missio Dei* notion has helped to articulate the conviction that neither the church nor any other human agent can ever be considered the author or bearer of mission. Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world. It is a ministry in which the church, is privileged to participate. Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people.⁷

The Church at the service of *Missio Dei*

Our missionary activities are only authentic insofar as they reflect participation in the mission of God. The primary purpose of the missions *Ecclesiae* (church mission) can therefore not simply be the planting of churches or the saving of souls; rather, it has to be service to the *missio Dei*, representing God in and over against the world – pointing to God. In its mission, the church witnesses to the fullness of the promise of God's reign and participates in the ongoing struggle between that reign and the powers of darkness and evil.



The biblical and theological meaning of mission involves sending and being sent. Quite simply, then, the church is mission because it is sent to the world. As Jesus is an approach or address of God to human history, and in this sense “sent”, so too the church is church by its participation in the *missio Dei* and its commission to be its agent. The church is sent to and for the world.

The church came to be church in the recognition that it is a mission. This consciousness is reflected in all the gospels and most clearly in such sayings as those from John’s gospel: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21), and “as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). This then is the basic meaning of mission as applied to the church: the church as a corporate body or communion as a whole, is sent, and it is sent outward to the world. Just as the Son is sent as God in human flesh to effect peace and communion with God and genuine union among men and women, so does the church by continuing the mission “till the end of time” (Matt 28:20).

The church’s concern for conversion, church growth, the reign of God, economy, society and politics are being missioned to but in a different manner! As Christ was servant of God for the world, so too the church is sent to the world. Not that the church is subservient to the world, its slave, but rather its existence cannot be understood apart from a dynamic functional relation of responding to the world’s needs, whether the service be critical or supportive.⁸

There will never be a time when the world, with all its political, social and economic issues, ceases to be the agenda of the church. At the same time the church can go out to the edges of society not fearful of being distorted or confused by the world’s agenda, but confident and capable of recognising that God is already there.⁹ The church in mission responds and bears witness to the “presence” of self-emptying love of the Father. “God sent His only Son into the world so that we might have life through him” (1 John 4:9).

Strongly advocating the mission of the church to be “present” or “be” in the world are the following theologians and missiologists:

- Leslie Ratus, who points out that: “An apostle, who wishes to be ‘present’, as Christ was ‘present’ to the world must be prepared to undergo the Christic experience of kenosis. No true presence is without the initial attitude of self-emptying, by which the disciple dispossesses himself of all that which may alienate him from the human situation of his environment and from proclaiming the Good News in and through his life. . . . the apostolate of presence cannot be lived unless one is prepared, like Christ, to share with deep solidarity the particular features of the condition – social, economic, cultural – of one’s fellowman. . . . By being ‘present’, we are to be ‘one with them’, suffering from what makes them suffer, loving what they love, aspiring as they aspire for greater truth and justice”.¹⁰

- Roger Haight, makes a point by clarifying how the church is at the service of mission: “The Church is related to its mission (missio) as existence is related to purpose of existence. This means that the whole being of the church is a being-for-the world. The church as missio is by nature dynamic, related to the world functionally and under the imperative to play a role in human history”.¹¹

- Walbert Buhlmann has this to offer: “The mission of the church is not to secure the salvation of souls, which would otherwise be lost, or to bring the greatest possible number into the church as the ark of salvation; rather it has the aim of building up the church as a sign of salvation for all and of gaining new witnesses to the grace of God already working in the world”.¹²

- Avery Dulles echoes Buhlmann: “The number of conversions and baptisms, while it may be significant, does not tell the whole story. What is of chief importance is that the reality of the church be incarnated in each people to whom the Gospel is preached”.¹³

- Jose Comblin strongly expresses his belief that: “If the church is mission for the world, when it ceases to go out of itself and fails to address the world, it ceases to be authentically the church of Christ”.¹⁴

- Adrian Hastings adds that: “It is, therefore somewhat misleading to say that the church has a mission, as if the existence of the church comes first. In truth it is because of the mission that there is church. The church is the servant and expression of the mission”.¹⁵
- The Second Vatican Council, documented that as servant of *Missio Dei*, the church is not the kingdom of God but “it is on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom”.¹⁶
- Josef Schmitz also adds that: “The church can be a credible sacrament of salvation of the world only when it testifies to humanity a glimmer of God’s imminent reign – a kingdom of reconciliation, peace, and new life, in the here and now”.¹⁷
- Howard Snyder helps to distinguish between “church people” and “kingdom people”: “We are called therefore, to be ‘kingdom people’ not ‘church people’. Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church. Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church changes the world”.¹⁸

In the light of what we have just cited above and with this new understanding of the church as servant of *missio Dei*, are we ready to let go of our accustomed expressions of church in order to have the Word come to birth in the cultural expression of others, of those whom we serve?

Mission is being the “Human Face of God”

Our common experience of the church has been a “doing church”: we must ‘do’, we must ‘perform’, we must ‘build’ – a lot of ‘dos and doings’ but too many activities tire the body, the brain and even the soul! If the church’s focus is only on doing something, the church comes to have little meaning in itself. Thus,

the church is not just called to do something. It is called to be something – a witness to God’s intentions for all things. Missionary activity sociologically speaking is indeed one activity of the church among others but the true nature of the church is a ‘being’. The church is a sacrament – a sign of the Person Christ being in relationship with the people of God. Thus, the church is called to “be” – “be church” – “be the ‘Human Face of God’” on earth. A catch statement of liberation theology expresses this aptly: “In Christ man gives to God a human countenance and God gives man a divine countenance”.¹⁹

The Face of God that is apparent in all the pages of Isaiah 40–46, has four characteristics which stand out: disinterested love, creative power, faithful presence, demanding holiness. The Face of God is then a skylight for human life, the root for liberation and resurrection. It is the eternal Good News for oppressed people. Without this Face all becomes darkness. There is no lamp or candle that can replace it. Whoever does not know it does not feel its absence. But whoever finds it does not know how to live without it. The meeting with God revolutionises life, forces one to discover what is wrong in us and around us, animates for the struggle, and finally to put everything in its own place, as God wants it.²⁰

The principle of inculturation means that church must be firmly rooted in and expressive of the lives of the various peoples of this world and their cultures; the church must become indigenous to a people. Once the seed of the Gospel is accepted by a people, it must be allowed to grow and express itself in the proper form of each culture. Talking about the enormous changes that are taking place in the field of church’s mission, Fr. John Wijngaards, a Mill Hill missionary director of Housetop Centre for Communication in London, aptly says: “The time of scattering the seed may have passed. The time has now come to allow the seed to grow, in its soil, obeying its own embryonic urges and shaping its own blades of new life”. Wijngaards continues to say that, “This dramatic shift will mean earthing the Gospel in the local culture, dialogue with other religions and traditions, enlarging the aspect of liberation and a new Christian presence in society”.²¹

According to Haight:

“A church whose forms are not identified with the perceptions, language and symbols of a people, and shaped by their deepest values and ideas, cannot possibly be understood; it will be foreign and alien. More deeply, the very idea of Christ as an incarnation, of the immanence of God to history, implies that the church should immerse itself in the total life and culture of the people among and for whom it exists”.²²

Throughout the world the church is facing institutional crises – shortage of personnel, conflicts with governments, unforeseen social and technological developments. The real challenge however, is one of the Spirit: Will the church be able to respond with a new dynamic inner life, surprising the world as so often in history, by unsuspected resources of creativity and vitality? For Christianity to become authentically oceanic in an island soil, more is needed than what used to be called “adaptation”. There must be a time of rebirth and our faith must be re-found and re-thought in its organic truth, and expressed in a new way from within the Pacific oceanic community.

The church exists in order to be turned outward towards the world. This dynamic and functional understanding does not undermine a substantive view of the church and the necessity of building up its inner life. A church without an inner life would be useless for its mission.

Because of the humanity of the church, her mission is always in constant need of being renewed and re-conceived. *Missio Dei* purifies the church. It sets it under the Cross – the only place where it is ever safe. The Cross is the place of humiliation and judgement, but it is also the place of refreshment and new birth.

In our modern world today, poverty, misery, sickness, crime and social chaos have “sky rocketed” to an unheard of, unprecedented scale. People have become victims of other people; *homo homini lupus* (The human being is a wolf to other human beings).²³ Marginalised groups in many countries of the world lack every form of active and even passive participation in society. Inter-

human relationships are disintegrating. People are in the grip of a pattern of life from which they cannot possibly wrench themselves free. Marginality characterizes every aspect of their existence. To introduce change, as into all this, is to rethink salvation in the theology of neighbour where “love of God is also love of neighbour” and as Gaudium in Spes says, “the joys and hope, the grief and anguish of the men (and women) of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well”.²⁴

Recently, the leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia fully and unreservedly acknowledged the devastating harm caused to people by the crime of child sexual abuse. They admitted that “too often in the past it is clear some Church leaders gave too high a priority to protecting the reputation of the Church, its priests, religious and other personnel, over the protection of children and their families, and over compassion and concern for those who suffered at the hands of Church personnel” and that “the Church is also ashamed to acknowledge that, in some cases, those in positions of authority concealed or covered up what they knew of the facts, moved perpetrators to another place, thereby enabling them to offend again, or failed to report matters to the police when they should have”.

After admitting their wrong, the Catholic Church of Australia, humbly apologised: “for all these things the Church is deeply sorry and to all those who have been harmed and betrayed. It humbly asks for forgiveness”. The leaders also committed themselves, “to endeavour to repair the wrongs of the past, to listen to and hear victims, to put their needs first, and to do everything we can to ensure a safer future for children”.²⁵

Today in our alienating and rapidly changing world we are torn by the number of options as we hunger for deeper experiences of intimacy and belonging. We have seen how the church has received a divine mandate to mission to the world and how it is clearly emphasises the primacy of persons and relationships over all merely administrative activities. Genuinely living the mystery of the *missio Dei* the church invites others to see what we see and to share what we share – the very Life and Love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

To Be a Community of Difference

The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesian (1:15–23) that the church, by its very nature witnesses to the powers and the principalities of God's redeeming power. The church exists as a radical contrast community – a community where fear, hatred, separation, segregation and suspicion are overcome by love, faith, justice, unity, forgiveness and trust (Eph2:11–22). Paul calls us for a vision of a different and radical community. It asks of us questions that we may find tough to answer. For example, the vision of communion the New Testament was a community of “difference”. So, why are our churches so often communities of sameness? Why are our churches so segregated when God longs for them to be culturally varied yet one “as the Father and I are one” (John 17). There is nothing miraculous about “sameness” and “likeness” but there is something miraculous about God breaking down the walls that divide us one from another to create a community of the wonderfully different who are made one through Jesus and the Spirit's power. Paul Fiddes, a Baptist theologian, goes so far as to say: “There is only truly missional church when the assembly is made up of the old and the young, employed and unemployed, male and female, black and white, healthy and handicapped”.²⁶

Our Pacific Way of “unity in diversity” demands sensitivity to cultural differences while crying for global integration. We have the cultural consciousness of various peoples, the emergence of new nations with their attachments to their national and cultural heritage on one side, and global meetings and struggles for global efforts in solving humanity's problems on the other side. This is an ongoing challenge for us – to be one church with many varied expressions – to be one big family of “island kainga” (extended family).

Missiology : The Theology of Missio Dei

Rethinking mission theology means welcoming missiology to be the theological science of missio Dei. We have recited earlier that in the 19th century the special discipline of missiology appeared within Protestantism to study specifically the mission thinking of the time. On the Catholic side, Joseph Schmidlin in 1914 became the first professor of missiology when the chair was established at Munster, Germany.²⁷ Ever since then a new era of rethinking

the church's mission has contributed to the development of missiology and of its acceptance into the main theology field. Only laboriously did theology begin to incorporate the new insight of mission. Karl Barth succeeded in doing this better than most of the systematic theologians. The outcome of it all was a real advance over the traditional position. In poetic language, Ivan Illich gives expression to this by defining missiology as:

“The science about the Word of God as the church in her becoming; the Word as the church in her borderline situations; the church as a surprise and a puzzle; the church in her growth, the church when her historical appearance is so new that she has to strain herself to recognize her past in the mirror of the present; the church where she is pregnant of new revelations for a people in which she dawns. . . . Missiology studies the growth of the church into new peoples; The birth of the church beyond its social boundaries; Beyond the linguistic barriers within which she feels at home beyond the poetic images in which she taught her children Missiology therefore is the study of the church as surprise.”²⁸

We can no longer go back to the earlier position, when mission was peripheral to the life and being of the church. It is for the sake of its mission that the church has been elected, for the sake of its calling that it has been made “God’s own people” (Peter 2:9). So, mission cannot be defined only in terms of the church. Mission goes beyond the church. To say that the church is essentially missionary does not mean that mission is church-centred. It is *missio Dei*. It is Trinitarian. It is mediating the love of God and the people on earth whom God loves. *Missio Dei* is about serving, healing and reconciling a divided, wounded humanity.²⁹

For our theologising, this has far-reaching consequences. Just as the church ceases to be church if it is not *missio Dei*, theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character. The crucial question, then, is not simply what church is or what mission is; it is also what theology is and what theology is about. Missiologists such as Andersen, Meyer, Schmidt and Gensichen advocate that we need a missiological agenda for theology rather than just a

theological agenda for mission; for theology rightly understood, has no reason to exist other than critically to accompany the *missio Dei*. They continue to say that missiology may be termed the “synoptic discipline” within the wider encyclopaedia of theology. It is not a case of theology occupying itself with the missionary enterprise as and when it seems to it appropriate to do so; it is rather a case of mission being that subject with which theology is to deal. For theology it is fundamental that it should be in direct contact with mission and the missionary enterprise.³⁰ Cracknell and Lamb (1980) remark that, in the first edition of their study (1980) they would not have dared to suggest that every curriculum should find some place for the study of missiology; now, however, they would insist that all theological questions should be thought about from the point of view of the theology of mission. Only in this way can a “better teaching” of every subject come about.³¹ The task then of missiology is to accompany the other theological subjects in their work; to highlight theology’s reference to the world, it puts questions to them and lets them put questions to it; it needs to dialogue with them for their and for its own sake.³²

Missiology challenges what used to be called “practical theology”. Practical theology keeps the church occupied with its self-realisation in respect of its preaching, catechesis, liturgy, teaching ministry, pastorate, and diaconate, instead of having its eyes opened to ministry in the world outside the walls of the church, of developing a hermeneutic of missionary activity, of alerting a domesticated theology and church to the world out there which is aching and which God loves.³³

The Theological Function of Missiology

Missiology performs a critical function by continuously challenging theology to be *theologiavivatorum* (theology of the way). This means that theology is to accompany the gospel on its journey through the nations and through the times. In this role, missiology sets as a gadfly in the house of theology. It creates unrest by resisting complacency, opposing ecclesiastical impulse to self-preservation and fragmentation of humanity into racism or ideological blocs. It condemns every exploitation of some sectors of humanity by the powerful, religious, or by ideological or cultural imperialism.³⁴

Missiology's task is critically to accompany the missionary enterprise, to scrutinise its foundations, its aims, attitude, message, and methods – not from the safe distance of an onlooker, but in a spirit of co-responsibility and of service to the church of Christ. Missiological reflection is therefore a vital element in Christian mission – it helps to strengthen and purifies it. Since mission has to do with the dynamic relation between God and humankind, missiology consciously pursues its task from a faith perspective.³⁵

Missiology forces theological reflection to a deeper level of thought and questioning about the very nature and purpose of the church in human history. It helps to discern a fundamental shift away from a concern for statistics, and the quantity of Christians to the quality of the church life, the quality of sign. What is important is that the church, whatever its size, be an existentially real sign of salvation offered through Christ.

Missiology concerns with how the church should go about its mission. The question is: whether or not the church should communicate Christ and his grace, but how best to do this in a given moment of history. The understanding of the church as mission calls for a shift from a Sunday spirituality enclosed in the sphere of the church to one of engagement, responsibility and concern for the world outside and around it.³⁶

This consciousness cannot be nurtured through teaching alone; it must become embedded in the very institution of the church, in its language, in its preaching of the Gospel, in its sacramental symbols, in the direction of its organised and institutional ministries. The meaning of Eucharist, for example, cannot in a mission church be isolated from the problems of world hunger, or from other cries for nourishment all around us. Moreover, the church in adapting to a culture must be careful not to allow itself to become captive to it; it must retain its transcendence and ability to judge critically. But, for all that, the church must also inculturate itself in the modern world on the belief that, as in all cultures and despite its ambiguity, grace is operative in it.³⁷ Richard J. Todd said that: “A church with the ability of analysis and criticism of the world around it which can assume a prophetic role; it has the capacity for self-analysis and self-criticism for its own reform and renewal; it is a church that is able to say what it should be” .

He continues to say that, “In addition to having the ability to examine itself critically, a mature church in its prophetic role is able to analyse the world around it and to be critical of Christ’s teaching of what is sinful and unjust. It denounces what is evil, announces what is good and gives testimony to what it believes. Aware of all the elements that make up a developed church, it can make a self-analysis, be self-critical and plan for its reform or renewal.”³⁸

For our concern today, missiology will be a contextual illumination of the relationship between God, God’s world, and God’s church. It is, if one wishes, a “dialogue” between God, God’s world, and God’s church, between what we affirm to be the divine origin of mission, *missio Dei* and the praxis we encounter today. Perhaps van Engelen’s formulation sums it up best. He says that the challenge to missiology is “to link the always-relevant Jesus event of twenty centuries ago to the future of the promised reign of God for the sake of meaningful initiatives in the present”. In this way, new discussions on soteriology, Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, creation, and ethics will be initiated, and missiology will be granted the opportunity to make its own unique contribution. This remains a hazardous undertaking. Every branch of theology – including missiology – remains piecework, fragile, and preliminary.

There is no such thing as missiology, period. Here is only missiology in draft. *Missiologia semper reformanda est*. Only in this way can missiology beome, not only *ancilla theologiae*, “the handmaiden of theology” but also *ancilla Dei mundi*, “handmaiden of God’s world”. Missiology offers us a new way to do mission-theology. Missiology is theology reflecting on the world and tries to be part of the process through which the world is transformed.³⁹

New Challenges

New challenges call for new responses. The challenge for each of our local churches then is to being church in the world, to be a sign of the Reign of God. Each local church is called to freedom and creativity, dialoguing hermeneutically with its various religious and cultural roots and traditions, including by priority, the Gospel. The challenges that face us then are, how to animate the local churches so that they are “mission” in the world, involved in its struggles; how

to liberate them so that they can be free and creative; how to provide them with the tools necessary for their hermeneutic of tradition; how to listen to life and discover the presence of God's Word and Spirit among a people; and finally, how to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between them, leading to becoming God's Face on earth?⁴⁰

I believe that this exercise of rethinking mission and theology has a profound implication for our church leaders, our theologians and for those engaged in missionary work. It will require a reordering of priorities, away from structures aimed at efficient organisation and towards the spontaneous birth of new life. It will require a re-focusing from structures to "on persons" and the vitality of their faith and charity. It will focus in the meaning of mission and as John Ball said: "The enduring meaning of mission is the showing forth of the glory of God among all people. We seek to co-operate with God in the bringing about of his kingdom which is already and not yet, already present and not yet fulfilled."⁴¹

As the new Commission faces the challenges of *missio Dei*, perhaps the best place to stand might be beside the Apostle Paul, who when faced with issues of the post pagan era said, "We hold this treasure in earthen vessels that it may be made clear that this surpassing power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4:7–10).

Notes

¹ The Papers were: (i) *The Mission Call from Viwa to the Pacific Churches*, from "The Third Mission Conference", Viwa Island, Fiji, 9–18 April 2010; (ii) *The Namoli Framework* from the Consultation on *Rethinking the Journey and Course of our Hermeneutics in Oceania*, Namoli, Lautoka, Fiji, 13–18 March 2011; (iii) *The Elimination of Gender-based Violence*, from a workshop by partnership of PCC,

GPP (God's Pacific People) and Weavers, JoviliMeo Mission Centre, Suva, Fiji: 4–8 February 2013.

² David J. Bosch, “*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*”, American Society of Missiology Series, No. 16. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1991, p. 390. Karl Barth was a Swiss reformed Theologian. He is often regarded as the greatest Protestant Theologian of the 20th century.

³ Bosch, “*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*” pp.390–391.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, p.391

⁶ *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*”, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 7 December 1965, no. 9, in Vatican II, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. by Austin Flannery (New York: Costello Publishing, 1988 revised), p. 823.

⁷ Bosch, “*Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*” p. 392.

⁸ Roger D. Haight, “*The ‘Established’ Church as Mission*”, Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago, 1984 in *The Church as Mission: Permanent Seminar*, Studies, No. 2; ed. by James H. Provost, (Canon Law Society of America, Washington, D.C..1984,) p. 29.

⁹ WCC, 1983:50.

¹⁰ Quoted by David Bohr in “*Evangelization: The Essential and Primary Mission of the Church*”, p. 71.

¹¹ Roger D. Haight, “*‘Established’ Church*” p. 11

¹² Ibid., p. 22. See also, Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church* (Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1976), p. 145.

¹³ Buhlmann, p.22; See also, Avery Dulles, “*The Dimensions of the Church*” (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1967), p. 54.

¹⁴ Haight, p. 11.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 9. See also, Adrian Hastings, “*Mission*,” *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. by Karl Rahner (New York Seabury Press 1975), p. 968.

¹⁶ *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, no. 5, in Vatican II, p.353.

¹⁷ Bosch, p. 377.

¹⁸ Bosch, p. 378. Howard Snyder is an ordained elder of the Ohio Conference of the Free Methodist Church and a Professor of History Theology of Mission.

¹⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, SCM Press, London 1979, p. 206.

²⁰ Carlo Mesters, “*The Bible and the New Evangelization*”, p. 17 in *East Asian Pastoral Review*, Manila, 1990.

²¹ Haight, p. 33.

²² Haight, p. 22.



- ²³ Bosch, p. 399.
- ²⁴ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium in Spes*, 7 December 1965, Vatican II, no.1.
- ²⁵ “*Commitment Statement from Leaders of the Church in Australia*”, first published in the Truth Justice and Healing Council’s *Towards Healing* submission to Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual abuse, September 2013.
- ²⁶ Andrew Picard, “Being and doing – the truly missional church”, Laidlaw College, 30 August, 2010, p. 2.
- ²⁷ Bohr, p.40. Josef Schmidlin (1876–1944) is regarded the Father of Catholic missiology.
- ²⁸ Bosch, p. 492.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p.493.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p.494.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 496.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Haight, p. 27.
- ³⁶ Ibid., pp. 27, 30.
- ³⁷ Ibid., pp. 30, 31.
- ³⁸ Richard J. Todd, From the Concept of Mission to the Concept of Developing Churches: A Proposal in Missiology: *An International Review*, Vol. XII, No. 2, April 1984. Richard J. Todd was Head of the Secretariat for Developing Churches for the Claretian Missionaries and for eight years he coordinated their missionary work in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- ³⁹ Bosch, p. 498.
- ⁴⁰ Cf., Michael Amaladoss, “*Inculturation In India: Historical Perspectives and Questions*”, Paper presented at the Missio International Consultation on “Christian Faith and the World Cultures: Enquiry and Perspectives in the Process of Inculturation”, Aachen, Germany, 20–25 February 1994.
- ⁴¹ John Ball, *Theological Trends*, Missiology 1: Incarnate Christianity in “The Way”, No. 1, 1985, p.61.



Same Sex Marriage

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Introduction

Same sex marriage is all the rage nowadays. I mean this in two ways, firstly, in the sense of popularity and fashionability that the word 'rage' connotes in social media, and secondly, I am thinking of the rage that same sex marriage has provoked in certain quarters of society. It is indeed an issue that is passionately argued and hotly debated around the world today. Be that as it may, it would be fair to say that this so called 'rage' is more concentrated in certain parts of the world than in others. And this would be true of the Pacific region itself where the debate is much more intense around Pacific rim areas like Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Hawaii than around the Pacific islands themselves. As far as Pacific island nations and churches are concerned, same sex marriage as an 'issue' is either ignored or pointedly shown the back door. But whether we like it or not, same sex marriage is knocking on our Pacific shores if not on our doors. Aotearoa New Zealand has become the latest nation in the world to legalize same sex

marriage. Similar movements are also currently taking place in Australia and in the American state of Hawaii. We in the Pacific cannot escape the fact that we are affected in one way or another by the onset of same sex marriage in our region. In this regard, I applaud PCC's initiative to engage with the issue of same sex marriage at a time when there is clearly a lack of dialogue and hence a sense of direction in and among pacific churches and pacific nations on this topic.

A brief glance at Christian perspectives on same sex marriage will show that the current debate hinges on two main lines of argument- one is a basically fundamentalist view of what the Bible says about homosexuality, and the other is a more liberal view that looks at the ethical understanding of God's concern for justice and equality (Beach, 1988; Farley, 2006). On the side of justice, the basic point that undergirds their whole argument is the belief that homosexuality is not so much a matter of choice but a work of nature (see Whitehead, 2010; for a scientific argument against this). So if people of homosexual orientation cannot help being that way inclined, then according to the ethical and justice view, we should embrace homosexuals in their difference and bestow to them the love that God has for everyone. On the other hand, according to the fundamentalist perspective, the biblical view is clear enough on homosexual practices, i.e., the bible condemns any form of homosexual behaviour.

Methodology

One can deal with the topic of same sex marriage in any different number of ways. Approaching it from a biblical perspective narrows it down somewhat, though bearing in mind that biblical studies is itself interdisciplinary in nature. In other words, biblical studies has brought into its fold a variety of insights from other disciplines that have helped in the interpretation of biblical texts. On that note, I want to state at the outset that this paper can only be exploratory in nature and will not pretend to be the last word on the subject. Its humble aim is merely to get the conversation moving by engaging people's minds on some of the insights that the study of the bible has to offer with regards to same sex marriage.

But the burning question is, does the bible address the issue of same sex marriage at all? While there are numerous references in the bible on 'marriage', the same cannot be said for 'same sex marriage'. The topic simply does not get a mention and reasons for this will not need to be discussed here. This non-mention however does not therefore mean that same sex marriage or a similar kind of arrangement did not exist in biblical times. Certain studies have pointed to the possibility that something akin to same sex/same gender families did exist in the ancient world (Brenner, 2010; cf Meyers, 1988). On the other hand, if the bible does not directly address same sex marriage per se, it does actually say something about homosexuality, though reference is made only to male homosexuality.

While there might be a distinct possibility that some marriages do not necessarily demand any form of sexual intercourse as opposed to alternative means of showing love and affection, the general assumption is that sex is part and parcel of any marriage (Fuchs, 1983, Beach 1988, Farley, 2006). I will grant at this point that a discussion of the institution of marriage in the bible is an essential part of the overall conversation on same sex marriage. This paper however, will focus mainly on the study of those biblical texts that express an attitude towards 'homosexuality'.

As I have mentioned before, much of the debate at the moment seems to focus a lot of its energy on the question of homosexuality. What does the bible say about it? If it condemns homosexuality, then should not that be the end of the matter? Others however will want to say that homosexual orientation is not by nurture but by nature (Beach, 1988, Farley, 2006; contra Whitehead, 2010). Hence, the question of justice is brought into the discussion.

This paper however hopes to contribute to the conversation in a different way. That is, by means of clarifying as clearly as possible the underlying attitudes inscribed in those biblical texts that talk about homosexual activity and more specifically, texts that make an assessment of or pronounce judgement on homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13, Gen19, Judg19, Deut 23:18; Rom 1:26-27; 1Cor 6:9; 1Tim 1:10). Reference to homosexual activity however presupposes that there is heterosexual activity somewhere. In fact almost all references to

sexual activity in the Bible concern heterosexual relations. Some incursion(s) will therefore be made into texts that a number of interpreters have used to support their claims for heterosexuality (Gen 1:26-27; Gen 2:22-24).

The choice of texts discussed in this paper by no means exhausts the number of texts that may have a bearing on this discussion. Biblical exegesis tends to be technical at times but I will try to keep it as simple as possible without losing the gist of things.

Leviticus 18:22.

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. (NRSV)

Leviticus 20:13

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. (NRSV)

These are the 2 main references in the bible that legislate on homosexuality. At first sight, the law of Leviticus cannot be more clearer on homosexuality than this. Homosexual activity is not only prohibited and declared an abomination (something abhorred, detested) but is also to be punished by death. This prohibition of homosexuality occurs in a collection of moral prohibitions and penalties (Lev 18-20) that is in turn part of a larger collection of materials commonly referred to as the Holiness Code (Lev 17-27).

Four main areas of the life of 'the people of Israel' are governed by this collection of moral prohibitions in Lev 18-20: sexual behaviour, social ethics, worship, and family relations (Kaiser, 1995).

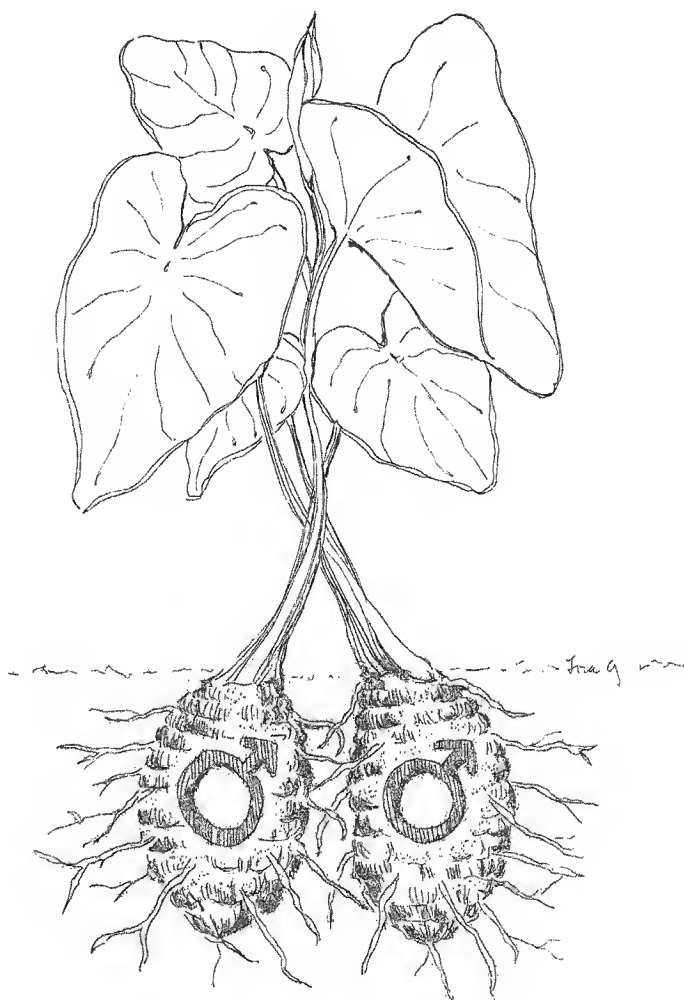
Lev 18:22 can literally be translated from the Hebrew as follows- **'And with a male, you shall not lie the lying down of a woman; it is an abomination.'**

Similarly with Lev 20:13- **'And if a man lies with a male the lying down of a woman, the two of them have done an abomination; they shall surely be put to death, their blood is upon them.'**

Comparing this translation with the NRSV translation, one finds a significant difference between the two. The key phrase here is **‘the lying down of a woman’**- basically it means ‘to experience the reception of sexual penetration as a woman would’ (Walsh, 2001). So Lev 18:22 should be read as, ‘Do not lie with a male as a woman would...’ Clearly, the law is directed against the man who would allow another male to sexually penetrate him. It is the man taking the passive sexual role that is targeted here, not the active or penetrative partner as implied by the NRSV translation.

On the other hand, Lev 20:13 includes in its prohibition both the man taking the passive sexual role and the one taking the active role of penetration. Why this difference in emphasis? Lev 20:13 is actually a later edition of the earlier text in Lev 18:22 (Olyan, 1994). So it follows that, where the guilty party was originally the man who would allow himself to take the passive sexual role in a male-male penetrative intercourse (Lev 18:22), now it is both parties who are guilty according to the later revision in Lev 20:13. We may note that what is specifically prohibited under Levitical law is the penetrative act of sexual intercourse performed by two men. One may wonder at this point whether by legislating against a particular way, i.e., the penetrative male-male sexual act, the Levitical law makers were deliberately being open minded towards other possibilities. Furthermore, intimate relationships between men are certainly not outlawed, provided such intimate relationships do not go as far as performing penetrative sex.

It is interesting to learn that where male-male sexual intercourse was prohibited under Israelite law, certain homosexual relationships were lawful in ancient Roman and Greek societies (Olyan, 1994). For the Romans, homosexual relationships usually occurred between a man and his slave and never between men of the same social status. In contrast to the Roman system is the Greek one where only men of the same social status were legally allowed to have homosexual relations, though usually between an older man and a much younger one. Again, the prohibition under these laws was addressed to the passive receiver of penetrative sex. The underlying factor that animates these two legislations is the cultural and social value of ‘honour and shame’. What this implies is that the law is not so much designed to give open license to all



manner of homosexuality but rather to ensure that the value of honour and shame is securely maintained. That is, in homosexual activity, the superior male must never allow himself to be shamed in the act of passive sexual penetration. Thus where the ancient Roman and Greek laws ‘legalized’ homosexual relations between men, this was nevertheless formulated within the dynamics of ‘honour and shame’. This same principle of honour and shame would apply also to the Israelite law against homosexual activity, even if it completely differs from the Roman and Greek laws.

Under Levitical law, all male citizens of Israel including resident aliens were prohibited from allowing themselves to be the passive receivers of sexual penetration by another male (Lev 18:26). But what if one was coerced into the act? A later revision of this law included in its prohibition the active partner as well (Lev 20:13). This means that the active penetrator was now brought into justice under the new revision of the law. However, the law does not say anything about homosexual activities among slaves or among women. Does this exclusion of slaves and women from the law of homosexuality mean that they are given an opening to practise? Any lawyer worth their salt would find a loophole somewhere I’m sure.

But the question that comes to mind is: what really is the reason behind this Levitical legislation? According to Lev 18:24-30, homosexual activity as well as other sexual activities like incest, adultery and bestiality were prohibited because they defiled the land. This is why the Canaanites were driven out or ‘vomited’ out by the land. And if the Israelites (i.e., the ‘free’ citizens) are guilty of the same thing, then they will die as well as being vomited out by the land. What this implies is that ownership and occupation of the land was high on the priestly agenda. Defilement of the land was the condition for being vomited out of the land. In order to secure ownership and occupation of the land, free Israelite men must conform to the laws of holiness stipulated in Levitical law. In this law, God demands that Israelites ‘be holy for I Yahweh your God am holy.’ (Lev 19:2) And this brings us to a further question: how does this specific homosexual practice prohibited by law ‘defile’ the land?

One likely answer is that when a man allows another male to penetrate him sexually, a confusion of gender identity occurs where the man has taken over

a sexual role that is proper only to a woman. Hence, he has not respected the division of human beings into male and female as set out in creation (Gen 1:26-30). Similarly with other prohibited sexual activities, incest and adultery are an 'abomination' because of the failure to recognize the separation between appropriate and inappropriate sexual partners. With bestiality, there is failure to recognize the division between human and animal. For Leviticus then, the faithful maintenance of the 'separation' between what is clean and unclean, between male and female and between Creator and creature is the way for Israel to fulfill the command 'to be holy, for God is holy'. Separation from other nations (Egypt and Canaan) was also imperative so that Israel remains holy and hence may rightfully stake a claim for ownership and occupation of the land.

If we may now shift our attention to the first creation story in Genesis 1, we find that the idea of 'separation' is also found there- God separated light from darkness (1:4), the dome separated the waters above from the waters below (1:7), and lights in the dome separated day from night (1:14). There may well be a certain significance attached to this repetition of 'separate' in the first creation story. But this is largely overshadowed by the (8 times) repetition of other statements like 'and God said, Let there be light...', 'Let there be a dome...', etc. and the oft repeated refrain, 'and God saw that it was good'. The idea of 'division' is also hinted at in the story when plants and animals were created 'according to their kind' (vv. 11, 12, 21, 24, 25).

Now when humankind was created in the image of God, this appeared to be something more special than the rest of creation. God created the human in his image, in the image of God he created him, 'male and female' he created them (1:26-28). But despite this elevated view of the human species, we find that humankind is not as 'elevated' as many people make them out to be. For instance, when God commands them to 'be fruitful and multiply', this command was already addressed to the sea creatures and the birds of the sky (1:22). In other words, procreation was a blessing already shared with sea creatures and birds. Furthermore, the earth itself was also called upon to co-create, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation...', 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures...' (1:11; 1:24).

From this short analysis, I make the following 2 points:

1. That there is no real significance attached to the idea of ‘separation’ in the first creation story. Israelite separatism that is prominent in the Levitical laws of holiness cannot be legitimized by reference to Genesis 1.
2. That the elevated status of humankind is greatly undermined by the fact that humankind has to share the divine vocation of ‘co-creation’ with the earth and other creatures (Brett, 2000:26-27).

Let us now go back to Leviticus 18-20. Many scholars have made the connection between the Levitical demand for holiness (being ‘set apart’ or being ‘separated’) and the separation of the species into their kinds and with the creation of humankind into male and female in Gen1 (Fuchs, 1983; Olyan, 1994; Walsh, 2006). The point of the argument is that ‘holiness’ in the Levitical laws of sexuality is congruent with the significance of ‘separation’ asserted in Gen 1. But as we have seen, there is no justification for any idea of separatism being emphasised in the first creation story. In other words, the notion that sexual/gender identity (i.e. male and female) should be upheld as a sign of holiness cannot be justified by appealing to the creation of the image of God as male and female in Gen 1. It follows also therefore that the Levitical laws on sexuality should be seen as standing on their own. Prohibition against a specific form of homosexuality in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 is therefore based on an idea of holiness that is in turn based on rules set according to the binary divisions of clean/unclean, male/female, kin/non-kin, Israelite/foreign, etc. We remember also that these prohibitions were a safeguard for Israel against the loss of ownership of the land. This of course would be a valid enough concern on the part of the priestly circles who put together the final touches to the book of Leviticus during the time of colonial rule under the Persian empire. One gets the idea therefore that the prohibitions in Leviticus were made to serve a larger purpose than a mere sticking to the rules of holiness. But that is a question for another investigation.

Genesis 19 & Judges 19.

I will treat these two texts together because they are similar in content and more importantly for our purposes, they include narration of activity that is homosexual in nature. There is a general consensus among readers of the bible that Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned and burnt to the ground because of the nature of its sin, that is, homosexuality. A look at other references in the Bible that consider the sin of Sodom would show that none of them ever thought of homosexuality (Is 1:10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; and Ez 16:49). A common thread running through these prophetic texts would be the theme of 'oppressing the weak' or 'the abuse of power' (Brett, 2000:68). If this was the popular biblical understanding of Sodom's sin, it can also be said that this theme would be congruent with the sin of Sodom as well as of the men of Gibeah. While it is true that the purpose of the men of Sodom and of Gibeah was to perform penetrative sex with the guests of Lot or with the Levite in Gibeah, their primary intention was really to humiliate the stranger(s) (Stone, 1995). In Sodom, the men of the city express a social attitude that expects resident aliens and strangers to 'know' their place, i.e., they ought to 'maintain a subordinate position or suffer the consequences' (Brett, 2000:67). Thus in light of the social dynamics of honour and shame, it would be more appropriate to think of Sodom's and Gibeah's sin as that of the abuse of power.

Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10.

Apart from Rom 1:26-27, the other references in 1Cor and 1Tim only mention homosexuality by means of lists of vices, but do not specifically point it out. In Romans, homosexuality is classified by Paul as a form of idolatry. In this connection, Paul claims that homosexuals have 'exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature than the Creator.' (Rom1:25). This would seem to be based on the Levitical call for holiness where the distinction between the Creator and creature must be maintained. Leviticus does not however merge the categories of illicit sexual practices and idol worship as Paul has done.

Job 39, 41.

I want now to end with a short reflection on God's speech to Job. In chs 39 and 41, God speaks to Job about the world of the wild in his creation. We all know how Job had complained to God about the unfairness of the way he has been treated. For according to the law of equal retribution, the one that Job lives by, he is an innocent sufferer. So when God finally answers Job, he doesn't answer the questions that Job had posed. Rather God is trying to make Job see how limited his vision was of the world. Job's ideal of justice (much like his friends'), is based largely on human knowledge and understanding which in turn are based largely on human experience. When this ideal of human justice and understanding is placed in the context of the vastness of God's design in the works of creation, then we see how narrow minded Job and his friends were in their respective arguments. God was effectively showing that Job's concept of justice is too narrow and too limited.

If the universe was created in the beginning by getting rid of the forces of chaos, God is telling Job that chaos is actually a part of creation. This is symbolized in God's speech by imageries of the wild. Nowadays we are in a situation where our access to the world of the wild is made a whole lot easier than it was for people of the ancient world. This world of the wild is made available to us through things like zoos and aquariums. It is even brought into the intimacy of our homes through television documentaries and such like. But despite this close-up view of the wild that we can now afford, we always sense that the wild is something out there... something that is somehow beyond our reach. This feeling on our part is not unlike the feeling of people of the ancient world.

Symbolically speaking, people of the ancient world have always associated the world of wild animals with chaos and desolation. The abode of the wild is a sphere of darkness and evil. So the conflict between good and evil is sometimes seen in terms of the conflict between the world of human beings and the world of wild animals. The human world and human culture is symbolic of the right moral order, true justice and true understanding. So when human beings are confronted with the world of the wild, all they want to do is to destroy it or to bring it under control.

Why?

Because the wild symbolizes all the values that are unacceptable in the world of human culture. The wild is something that must be destroyed, brought under control or pushed outside of the boundaries of human society. What God is effectively telling Job therefore, is that the world of the wild is an integral part of God's creation. In that part of God's creation, there is a certain order that was put there by design. In other words, it's not all chaos "out there"...

In fact there is a certain freedom in the wild that we humans can be envious of. At the end of God's speech to Job then, we get the sense that Job needs to start thinking outside of the box. In other words, he needs to understand that he and the confines of his own little world, is not the only cause for God's concern. Human beings are, but a part of the web of God's creation. Our human knowledge and understanding is limited. And it is by virtue of this limitedness of our wisdom that we tend not only to fear that which is unknown, but we also want to bring it under our control.

But God has shown in his reply to Job, which we cannot fully understand all that happens to us because of our own limitations. It is a good thing then to know and to admit to our limitations. When we know and own up to our limitations, then and only then, may we begin to acknowledge God's wisdom in our lives.

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<http://www.freedomtomarry.org/communities/entry/c/asians-and-pacific-islanders>

The Board of the Pacific Journal of Theology hereby expresses sincere apology to the Rev. Dr. Ma'afu Palu for inadvertently omitting the Endnotes for this article when it was first printed in the Journal Issue No. 48 of 2012. The whole article is re-printed hereunder.

Towards a Unifying Principle for the Bible: A Prolegomena on Pacific Hermeneutics



In one of his speeches delivered to the Annual Conference of the Free Wesleyan Church during his final visit to Tonga, Dr. A. H. Wood, former missionary and principal of Tupou College lamented the fact that the Methodist heritage which the nineteenth century missionaries brought to Tonga has now produced five different ecclesiastical establishments. He attributed the historical occasions that gave rise to these church divisions to differences in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Whether Dr. Wood's assessment of our contemporary ecclesiastical situation can be rectified is an altogether different issue.¹ This paper attempts to offer some reflections on how we may provide some control on biblical interpretation here in the Pacific Church by proposing the cross of Christ as the proper 'point of contact' or the bridge between the biblical text and us Pacificans as readers.

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Towards a Unifying View of the Bible

The point of departure of this inquiry is a comment made by John Bright on the use and abuse of the Bible: "The question of the unity of the Scripture must be taken seriously if the Bible is to be saved from disuse and misuse".² He insists that unless we have a view of the Bible in its unity, we are open to the charge of 'disusing' and 'misusing' the Holy Scriptures. Bright's insistence, however, raises the question as to whether there exists in the Bible a unifying theme which might serve to draw its diverse parts together into a complete whole. As Bright himself puts it: "Is there, amid its admitted discontinuity, any essential continuity?"³ In other words, what would be a unifying principle which would unite the Bible from its beginning to its end?

A Brief Survey of Various Proposals

Various proposals have been put forward both as direct and indirect attempt at responding to the question we have at hand. On the field of Old Testament studies, the different ways in which the Bible has been interpreted in accounted for by the differences in hermeneutical approaches. These efforts have been helpfully documented by R. E. Clements in his short monograph, *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation*.⁴ A similar attempt has been made in the discipline of New Testament Studies by S. Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*.⁵

Such works provide a helpful sketch of how each of the main corpus of the Bible in both the Old and New Testament has been interpreted throughout the history of biblical scholarship. They helpfully summarize the different approaches to understanding each of the main division of the Bible, namely, the Old and the New Testament.

Since works as such inevitably result in depicting the diversity of approaches to reading the Bible, it appears, on the one hand, that the hope of establish a unifying theme for the entire corpus of biblical literature, be it Old or New Testament would be shattered irretrievably. On the other hand, surveying the different approaches for interpreting the Bible also reveals that differences in interpretation heavily rely on the pre-determined interpretative worldview of the exegetes or the readers. We shall say more on this below.

From another perspective, the variety of approaches to the interpretation of the Testaments, especially in Old Testament studies seems to be governed by what is believed by each exegete to be the centre of the respective Testaments. The various proposals as to what the 'centre' of the Old Testament, have been helpfully documented by G. Hasel in his *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*.⁶

With respect to the discipline of New Testament studies, there appears to be no homogeneous attempt to determine a centre as such for the entire Testament, as far as I am concerned. This may be due to the fact that the subject matter of the New Testament is remarkably clear, namely, the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Largely, the attention in the study of the Gospels have, for a long time, been devoted to the application of biblical criticisms to various aspects of the Gospels. This results from the emergence of Higher criticism which defended the idea that the Gospels were the byproducts of various communities of faith rather than the testimony of the eye-witnesses to the Word incarnate. Recently, a strongly argued proposal against this way of thinking has been put forward which suggested that the Gospels were in fact evangelistic in their aims and that regarding their form as 'gospels', they were *sui generis* in their contemporary situation.⁷

In the meantime, however, the literary approach pioneered by scholars such as Robert Alter in the Old Testament has also been applied in many respects to the New Testament. This approach focusses more on the final form of the biblical text than on its sources'.⁸ J. Barton observes that the contemporary situation of biblical scholarship as one where synthesis takes precedence over analysis.⁹

An area in New Testament studies in which unabated dispute remains (with no immediate consensus looming in the horizon) is in the area of Pauline study.¹⁰ The centre of Pauline theology continues to be a hotly debated issue. There is a notable emergence of a more bible-centred approach in this debate that is quickly gaining ground in the field of New Testament study in which Martin Hengel from the Tübingen school stands out as its most prominent representative.¹¹

In general, however, problems remain with attempts as such. First, even though a consensus may be reached within the Old Testament or the New Testament in relation to their respective centres, the relationship between the two testaments remains a pressing question for serious biblical scholarship. This question was the subject of a PhD thesis by D. L. Baker which was subsequently published as *Two Testaments One Bible*. Many other books which deal more thoroughly with this issue have been published ever since.¹²

As a matter of fact, there are two main approaches which represent the two extremes within which attempts are being made to reconcile the two testaments. Baumgartel, on the one hand, drawing on Luther's approach to the Scriptures, proposes the view that the Old Testament presents a religion of Law from which we need to be redeemed and this is exactly the benefit yielded from the coming of Jesus Christ.¹³ This looks to me to be a more polished version of the view advocated by the *religionsgeschichte schule* in the pre-war years which considered the Old Testament religion as the primitive stage of what came to be known as Christianity in the time of Paul.¹⁴ The effect of such a view is to read the New Testament in complete discontinuity with the Old Testament.

Gerhard von Rad, on the other hand, makes the continuity between the Old and the New Testament a basis for his approach to interpreting the Old Testament.¹⁵ He poses the relationship between the two testaments in relation to a *typologische*. According to him, their relationship is an eschatological correspondence between the *UrZeit* and the *EndZeit*. Thus, everything for which the Old Testament stands becomes a type for which Christ becomes the antitype.¹⁶

The agenda of the *religionsgeschichte schule* prevailed in Old Testament scholarship during the period before World War I. After the war, however, younger biblical scholars at the time began to question the undergirding principles of the *religionsgeschichte schule*. The main problem with such an approach was that it denies serious bible believers the historical dimension of the faith. The pious concern of the *religionsgeschichter schule*,¹⁷ as it was known then, leads to a methodological departure from the then existing approach to the Old Testament and it eventually leads to the inauguration of the Biblical Theology movement

in the 1950s.¹⁸ This movement grew out of a certain dissatisfaction amongst biblical scholars with the interpretation agenda of theological liberalism.

The enthusiasm which the Biblical Theology movement has in its initial stages, however, did not last long. This was due in part to the failure amongst biblical scholars to agree on a unification principle for the whole Bible. In fact, when we consider the actual content of the biblical text itself, we are immediately confronted with the problem of the 'hermeneutical gap' which separates us Bible readers of any age after the first century AD from the content of the biblical account.

First, there is the problem which textual criticism seeks to address, namely, the quest for the precise content of the original biblical documents. This is largely known as the problem within the text. In both the standard version of the Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament Bible, scholars and students alike would find a complicated textual apparatus which contains necessary but not user friendly information into the biblical text as it has been transmitted throughout history down to us.

Secondly, there is also the problem behind the text to which historical critical studies have dedicated their interest in the attempt at verification of the referential status of the biblical text. Although a number of significant developments have resulted from deploying such an approach, (especially in ascertaining the geographical situations that surround the original hearers of the word of God) the overall effect of the historical-critical approach was to remove the credibility status that the biblical text once enjoyed in the church.

There was a time, according to Barth, in the life of the church, in which to speak about the resurrection of Jesus, as a 'fact of history' was regarded as an offence to the authorities in the theological disciplines of major Universities, at least, in Germany.¹⁹ Hence, his Commentary on Romans in which theological issues as such were discussed was like a bombshell that explodes in the 'front lawn' of the theological world of his day.

Thirdly, there is also the problem in front of the text, namely, the interpreter. Bultmann and Baumgartel have done us great service in this regard by establishing that we do not come to the text of Scriptures as *tabula rasa* ready to absorb the content of the text as it is exactly presented to us. Rather, we bring to the text, what they call our *Vorverständnis* or “pre-understanding”.²⁰ This constitutes of a mental package which has been moulded by our social status, our cultural norms, our technological progress, and other socio-economic factors which have significant bearings on the particularity of our personal lives as exegete of God’s words.

In Bultmann’s case, however, his pre-understanding package overrides the content of the biblical text and thus he seeks to “de-mythologize” the biblical text. In accordance with this approach, Bultmann removes anything that has a supernatural provenance in the biblical document by regarding it as “mythological”. His criterion for judging something to possess such a status is the modern worldview in which events are ascribed to the rational order of the universe but never to direct intervention by transcendent powers. He reckoned that the message of Scripture and of the Church is bound to an ancient worldview which is incompatible with modern or postmodern way of thinking shaped by science.²¹

But such an approach should set our exegetical alarm bells ringing loud and clear. For, the effect of Bultmann’s de-mythologization is not to let the ancient text of the Bible speaks as it were with its own voice but rather to remould it so that it end up speaking with a more modern voice – a voice resonating with the scientific findings of our own age.

In Bultmann, however, we find a forerunner of what has emerged in philosophical pluralism as the ‘new hermeneutics’.²² In this kind of hermeneutics, broadly speaking, the reader is given a higher status than the author of any given text. In fact, the author is reduced into a state of non-existence and so we readers can approach any text with unrestrained freedom to be the ‘author’ so to speak of what is given there. In other words, in the absence of the author, the readers become the inventor and creator of meaning.

Thus, the hermeneut's role is no longer simply to reproduce or verify meaning (and such was their traditional responsibility) but rather, to produce or create meaning. And since there is no way in which we can discern the author's intention, as the argument goes, what remains are the various perspectives from which the text can be read; all of which are to be regarded as equally sound. Therefore, there is no such thing as a 'wrong interpretation' and a 'right interpretation'. We are left only with 'perspectives' from which a reader reads a written document. So, there is a 'Pacific perspective' or an 'African perspective' and so forth.²³

Fourthly, apart from these attempts to produce a unifying principle for the whole Bible, there has been a re-emergence of books majoring on the diversity of the Bible which insists that there is no ground whatsoever for a reconciliation to take place between all the the diverse threads that can be isolated from the biblical text. J. G. D. Dunn and D. Kelsey,²⁴ both of whom are respected biblical scholars have advocated the theological diversity of the books of the Bible. A handful of conservative scholars have responded.²⁵

As far as I am concerned, these are the problems that has put the attempts at finding a unifying principle for the entire Bible into disarray. While relentless attempts at ascertaining a unification principle for the Bible as a whole continues, there have been various proposals on the methodological level regarding the way interpretation is to be done in which we may make it relevant to people of different cultural and historical particularities. It must be noted, however, that these attempts do not deal directly with ascertaining a unification principle for the whole Bible. Rather, their concern is specifically with the way one ought to understand the biblical text. We will now turn to consider such attempts.

Attempts At Striking a Middle Ground

Hans Georg Gadamer's "horizon" language, in my judgement, provides a platform for striking a compromise amongst interpreters and their interpretation.²⁶ If we were to disregard our differences on the level of the unity of the Bible and to be concerned with a particular biblical text, there are at least three 'horizons' of understanding which we can seek to merge in order for a reasonable understanding of the text before us is to be obtained.²⁷

First, there is the horizon of the text itself; what it says and what it was originally meant to convey to its original hearers. This is where exegesis is to be done on all levels especially the syntactical-grammatical level.

Secondly, there is the horizon of the interpreters pre-understanding – how he or she understands the text in accordance with his or her own culture in a way that the text affirms, corrects and sharpens his or her own understanding. In fact, if we do not hold a high view of the Bible then this is not an issue at all for us, but if the text is also the word of God then it should exercise upon our own thinking the same authority that God should have upon us as creatures.

Once these ‘horizons’ have merged, then there is left the ‘horizon’ of the hearers’ understanding. If we were to teach what we have gathered from our interaction with the text to an audience. This is the ‘gap’ that should demand our time and serious consideration. We must ask ourselves, how am I going to communicate these truths from God’s words in a way that is intelligible to my audience? Many a Bible teachers today have spend most of their time in doing exegesis and neglecting this important final part only to their peril. As a result, their exegetical findings fail to make sense to their readers.

It used to be the mark of the theologian as the person who can communicate the mystery of God in a way that is absolutely impossible for hearers’ to comprehend. But this is a way of theological reflection not derived from the theological paradigm sets forth by the incarnation itself. God became a human being so that he can be comprehensible to us and therefore to leads us back to fellowship with Himself.

An approach which can easily become a platform for striking a compromise amongst interpreters is Paul Ricoeur’s “refiguration” or “redescription” narrative approach. This is especially true here in the Pacific because we are remarkable story-tellers. Our identity as Pacific Islanders are bound up with narratives within the metanarrative of our respective island nations. Ricoeur proposes a ‘poetic’ approach to reading any text. Accordingly, the reference of the text does not lie on its correspondence to reality behind the text but rather in its ability to “re-describe” reality in front of the text – in other words, in application. In this schema, a novel has the same function as a non-fiction piece of writing because

what we are truly interested in, is the degree to which both self-contained symbolic systems 're-describes' or 'reconfigures' reality.²⁸

Applying this kind of approach to the Bible means that the effort of the historical-critic is decisively and finally laid to rest because biblical exegesis is no longer interested in the verification of the literary content of texts 'behind' the text. It is no longer the verification of the biblical text (and any text for that matter) that is important when we approach the biblical text, as Ricoeur would argue, but, rather, the application of the text. The basic question then for interpreters is no longer whether this text can be verified through its correspondence to an historical reality but whether the text before us can be applied to my life and be applied in such a way that the text is 'read' in my 'performance' of it. Thus, the task of biblical interpreters is no longer simply 'faith seeking understanding' but as Vanhoozer insists upon, it also includes 'understanding seeking performance'.²⁹

Scholars such as Hans Frei, George Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas of the Yale school have implemented this compromising stance in what has come to be known as the post-liberal approach to the Bible. It is Lindbeck's conviction that liberalism or what he prefers to call the experiential-expressivism approach has now run its course. Its impact has been to assimilate Christianity with all other religions in the world and thus render obsolete its distinctiveness. In other words, in accordance with liberalism, we can never assert Christian doctrines in their uniqueness. Rather, we can only state them in a way that assimilates them to other world religions. Accordingly, the common ground between all world religions is the fact that they are invariably different expressions of an experience of some kind of deity.

This was of course, the approach that undergirds ecumenism but, which, according to Lindbeck, has failed miserably. After many years of working towards such a goal there were still no sign that we were getting closer to its realization. The hope that we do have now, according to Lindbeck, lies in our honest re-statement of the distinctiveness of the Christian faith, doctrinally speaking, and then respecting other worldviews from which we differ. In other words, 'make your stand and then be nice to others'.

The advantage of post-liberalism over liberalism, however, is that it entails a wholesale return to the *sensus literalis* of the Bible. So post-liberalism is perhaps best represented in the language of Olson as “Back to the Bible – Almost”. Yet in this new movement there are already raw materials by which a middle position in the area of Hermeneutics can be sought. The problem with post-liberalism, in my judgement, lies in the fact that it encourages indifference towards the historical dimension of the biblical text. Taking the biblical text in its literary sense involved appreciating its revelatory status.³⁰ We must not invalidate the historical critical method in its service of literary study as is sufficiently manifested in the current trend of biblical literary study.³¹

Towards a Unifying Principle for the Bible

It should be obvious that my survey on the subject matter in question is sketchy.³² However, what I am highlighting in this discussion so far, is intended to be helpful in defining the contours of the issue with which we are dealing, namely, the differences in interpretation which has an immediate bearing on the theologies of the Pacific churches. At this point, I wish to point the way towards a resolution. In this regard, there are two major elements that I will delve into. First, I wish to provide a unifying principle for the entire Bible based on the teaching of Jesus. Secondly, I shall suggest a way of interpreting the text which we Tongans and Pacificans (i.e. Gentiles) can use in making the Bible relevant to us today or in any other era in history.

Towards a Resolution

It is my conviction that a sense of resolution amongst serious bible believers who are engaging in biblical interpretation whether for the purpose of personal edification or for teaching others can be achieved by recognizing that what has so far been referred to as the ‘hermeneutical gap’ between the biblical text and us today, is indeed a ‘spiritual gap’.

When I read the Bible, I realize that the blessings promised in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testament, do not in anyway include Tongans or Pacificans. I, as a Pacifican, am a Gentile and so I belong to those regarded by the Jews as the uncircumcised, being in exile and living outside the commonwealth of Israel, having no share in the Promises and in God (Eph. 2:11-13). As a Gentile, I am

spiritually 'far away' from the blessings that God has set forth in the Scriptures. God's blessings are the special privilege of his own people. I have no part as a Tongan in the salvation purposes of God as it is progressively unfolded in the Bible starting with the promise to Abraham and his descendants.

However, in the now-time, we who once were 'far away' have been brought near in the blood of Jesus Christ. By faith in the blood of Christ we, as Gentiles, have been, as Calvin said, experiencing an *insertio in Christum*. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have come near to the promises God had made to his own people the Jews. By faith we 'enter' the storied world of the Bible and partake together with believers whether Jews or Gentiles in the one new people of God enjoying the blessings he has made available to us in Jesus Christ (see Eph. 1:3-14). In a very real sense, therefore, Christ and his blood is my point of contact with the blessings in the text. Thus, there is a sense in which the sound interpretation of the biblical text by a Tongan (or any Gentile for that matter) ought to be heavily and unashamedly Christological in its orientation.

This is a scholarly trend which has been initiated through the work of the former Archbishop of the Sydney Anglican diocese, Bishop Donald W. B. Robinson and has been developed by his students Graeme Goldsworthy and Barry Webb amongst others.³³ To me, bridging this spiritual gap is one of the most important concerns that we as serious bible hermeneuts must deal with. What use is it for us to be able to analyze the biblical text in its minute technical details and then fail to participate in the blessings that it promises?

This may well be a hermeneutical version of the question our Lord asks his disciples as to 'what use it is for a man to win the whole world and forfeit his own life?' A good hermeneut of the biblical texts will always begin by providing a serious biblical response to such a searching inquiry from Jesus Christ. I am insisting that the cross of Christ is, according to God's progressive revelation in the Scriptures, the most appropriate 'point of contact' or 'bridge' through which we in our age or in any other age can enter the textually mediated strange new world of the Bible.

Applying this Approach to the Biblical Text

The approach I am proposing here is very much applicable to the Old Testament but it can also be utilized in a different manner with respect to the New Testament. There are four basic steps involved.

First, when we come to any biblical text, we must account for what I shall call the who-component of the text: Who is involved in the story? Who is speaking? And to whom?

Secondly, we must then account for the what-component of the text: What is each character's contribution to the narrative or the passage with which we are dealing?

Thirdly, we must then inquire into the who-component of these OT characters (or events) we have identified from the passage before us: Who is playing the role that only Jesus himself could play?

Since all the Scriptures, according to Jesus, is a testimony to himself (Lk. 24:44-47; Jn. 5:39-40; 19:28-30), the proper reference of the Old Testament is found only in the person and work of Jesus. Thus, rather than applying the text of the Old Testament directly to us, we must apply it horizontally to Jesus. I am of the conviction that the major figure of the Old Testament such as for example David and Abraham can find their proper reference simply in the person of Jesus. That is to say, we can replace them with ourselves and then apply the benefits belonging to them to us because, only through Jesus, because they were pointing to Him.

Fourthly, once we have applied the text to Jesus, then we are free to apply it to us today. We can identify ourselves with characters of the text that are benefiting from the character that stands in Jesus' place.

Concluding Remarks

I have argued that an important contribution to contemporary hermeneutical discussions which offer a possible resolution for interpretive differences between differing faith communities in Tonga and in the Pacific is that we apply the text

of the Bible to us by applying it first and foremost to Jesus and his cross. In other words, the cross of Jesus should be taken as the proper gateway through which Gentiles (i.e. Pacificans and Tongans) who are spiritually far away from the blessings of the Bible can lawfully enter the 'strange new world of the Bible' (to use Barth's terminology) in order to participate in the blessings textually mediated therein. The spiritual gap between us Pacificans (and therefore Gentiles) can only be appropriately bridged by the cross of Jesus. Therefore, if there be a Pacific Hermeneutics and if such an enterprise is to be strictly grounded on biblical principles, then, out of necessity, it must be cruci-shaped.

Notes

¹ Dr Wood's judgement is not unprecedented. It was defended by Gerhard Ebeling in a lecture in 1947. See G. Ebeling, 'Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der Heiligenschrift'. Tübingen, 1947. Reprinted in G. Ebeling, *Wort Gottes und Tradition* (Göttingen, 1964), 9-27. See the English translation *The Word of God and Tradition* (London, 1966), 11-31.

² See J. Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church*. (New York: Abingdon, 1946), 9.

³ See Bright, *Kingdom of God*, 9.

⁴ R. E. Clements, *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation*. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976). More recently, however, J. Barton has given a systematic account of the different interpretive methods in biblical study. See J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1984).

⁵ S. Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁶ See G. F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), Chapter 4.

⁷ I refer of course to the ground breaking essay by Richard Bauckham in the volume *The Gospels for all Nations*.

⁸ Alter is most famous for his book *The Art of Biblical Narrative* in which narrative strategy is employed to deal with difficult texts such as Genesis 38. See also R. Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (London: SPCK, 1992). Cf. M. Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).

⁹ See J. Barton, 'Looking Back on the 20th Century 2. Old Testament' *The Expository Times* 110:11 (1999): 348-351.

¹⁰ Perhaps another area which is worthy of mention here is the "quests" for the historical Jesus with the re-emergence of the so called 'third quest' to which leading scholars such as E. P. Sanders, N. T. Wright, G. Maier and others have turned their research interests to the Jewishness of Jesus.

¹¹ See M. Hengel and A. M. Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years*. (trans. J. Bowden. Louisville: Westminster, 1997), 100. Hengel argues that the centre of Paul's theology was formulated subsequent to his Damascus road experience and, that it is, 'justification of the godless' by God. See p. 105.

¹² See F. F. Bruce, *Canon of Scripture* (Glasgow: Chapter, 1988). See also G. Goldsworthy, 'Relationship of the Old Testament and the New Testament' in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (eds. T. S. Alexander and B. Rosner (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 81-89 and the bibliography cited there. See also See F. F. Bruce, *The Time is Fulfilled: Five Aspects of the Fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New*. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978).

¹³ See F. Baumgartel, 'The Hermeneutical Problem of the Old Testament' in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*. (ed. C. Westermann; London: SCM, 1963), chapter 7.

¹⁴ See C. Westermann, 'The Interpretation of the Old Testament' in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*. (ed. C. Westermann (London: SCM, 1963), chapter 4.

¹⁵ See G. von Rad, 'Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament' in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*. (ed. C. Westermann. London: SCM, 1963), chapter 1. See also a critique of his interpretation method by Bultmann and by Eichrodt in the same volume.

¹⁶ There has been a reassertion of von Rad's method of relating the two testaments through the new biblical theology approach advocated by scholars such as Graeme Goldsworthy. See G. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God*

in the Bible (Leicester: IVP, 1991). See also J. Ng and G. Clarke, 'Bridging the Gap Between the Old and New Testaments' *Briefings* #220 (June, 1998), 6-10.

¹⁷ See Westermann, 'Interpretation', 43. Gerhard Kittel's lead in this respect was followed by a number of prominent Old Testament scholars such as Martin Noth, Gerhard von Rad, and Walter Zimmerli, all of whom asserted the historical distinctiveness of biblical faith based on God's self revelation in the Scriptures.

¹⁸ G. E. Wright's works fall into this category.

¹⁹ See the 'Introduction' to his *Der Römerbrief*.

²⁰ See R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: SCM, 1952), chapter .4.

²¹ See Bultmann, *Jesus Christ*, 36. It is not surprising that the rise of the 'new hermeneutics' is attributed to the initiative of two of Bultmann's students, Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. See A. C. Thiselton, 'The New Hermeneutics' in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (ed. I. H. Marshall; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 308-333.

²² See a clear sketch of this approach and its implication to hermeneutics in D. A. Carson, *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), Part 1.

²³ There are two important books that have provided a sound evangelical response to this new trend in the area of Hermeneutics; D. A. Carson, *Gagging* and K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in this Text? The Bible, The Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

²⁴ D. H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). See also J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1977).

²⁵ See D. A. Carson, 'Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology' in *Scripture and Truth* (eds. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 65-100. See further, other contributions in that volume.

²⁶ See H-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tubingen, 1973. E.T. *Truth and Method*, London, 1975).

²⁷ This is the development of Gadamer's approach extracted by Carson from a survey of recent missiological literature. See D. A. Carson, 'A Sketch of Factors Determining Current Debate in Cross-Cultural Contexts' in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: The Problem of Contextualization* (ed. D. A. Carson; Nashville: Thomas

Nelson, 1984), 11-29. See also another application of Gadamer's method in E. P. Clowney, 'Interpreting the Biblical Models of the Church: A Hermeneutical Deepening of Ecclesiology' in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1984), 64-109.

²⁸ See P. Ricoeur, 'Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation' *Harvard Theological Review* 70:1-2 (1977): 1-37. See also his *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, action and interpretation* (Translated and edited. J. B. Thompson; Cambridge: CUP, 1981). Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach has been applied to biblical studies in narrative theology. See for example G. Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996). See also the works of Kevin J. Vanhoozer mentioned here and elsewhere.

²⁹ See K. J. Vanhoozer, 'The World Well Staged?' *Theology, Culture and Hermeneutics* in *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F.H. Henry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 1-30, see esp. pp. 29-30.

³⁰ This is the argument of P. F. Jensen, See his *The Revelation of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2002), chapter 1.

³¹ See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'Rethinking Historical Criticism' *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 7:3 (July, 1999), 235-271 and the bibliography cited there. Dobbs-Allsopp rightly argues that the disregard of the historical critical method evident in current biblical literary criticism is wrongheaded.

³² For a brief and critical account of some recent trends in hermeneutics, see D. A. Carson, 'Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends' *Themelios* 5/2 (1980): 12-20; reprinted in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 5 (1981): 8-25. See also Carson, 'Factors'.

³³ See P. G. Bolt and M. D. Thompson (eds), *Donald Robinson. Selected Works. Volume 1: Assembling God's People* (Moore College: Australian Church Record, 2008). See also P. G. Bolt and M. D. Thompson (eds), *Donald Robinson. Selected Works. Volume 2: Preaching God's Word* (Moore College: Australian Church Record, 2008); P. G. Bolt and M. D. Thompson, *Donald Robinson. Selected Works: Appreciation* (Moore College: Australian Church Record, 2008).

Book Review

The work is: Tavo, Felise. *Woman, Mother and Bride. An Exegetical Investigation into the “Ecclesial” Notions of the Apocalypse*. Biblical Tools and Studies, 3. Leuven – Paris – Dudley, MA.: Peeters, 2007. ISBN 978-90-429-1814-6. 78 Euro.

From Local Church to Bride of Christ The Nuptial Itinerary of the Apocalypse

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A highly competent work has recently established a young Tongan scholar, Felise Tavo, as one of the leading exegetes of the South Pacific. The book is an exegesis of the major “ecclesial” passages of the Apocalypse. It was presented successfully to Leuven Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Adelbert Denaux in 2005 and deemed worthy of publication in the Biblical Tools and Studies series of Peeters. The methodology used is a sensible and flexible one using historico-critical, literary and narrative forms of exegesis.

I present the main argument of the text here and add some comments.

There are seven chapters. The first two set the scene by reviewing the major literature available up to that time. This work, in effect, is one of the first major studies of the ecclesiology of this book. As, perhaps, the first one that takes in all the major passages on the church in this text, it is no great surprise that Tavo finds the material hitherto written lacking in comprehensiveness and depth. His review does alert Tavo to some of the major themes that have emerged in scholarship so far: the centrality of the cross-event; the truth that the seven churches represent the entire church, really embodied in each and, something fundamental to the church's existence, its relationship with Christ. He is also alerted of the need to take a trans-historical view of matters in this book. A greater attention to symbolism would have helped here, I think.

In the second chapter, Tavo presents his own structure of the text and comes up with a sevenfold schema. This is perhaps the least successful aspect of this impressive study. The text itself must be the final arbiter of any attempt at identifying the structure of the Apocalypse. The most successful attempt at this so far has been done by U Vanni (whose book, *La Struttura Letteraria dell'Apocalisse*, Rome '80, has unfortunately not yet been translated from Italian). Tavo bases his structure on those of Yabro Collins/Farrer, Schuestler-Fiorenza and Lambrecht rather than on the more professional one of Vanni. Yabro Collins follows Farrer in basing herself on the important idea of "seven." Schuestler Fioranza presents an insightful theologically based concentric pattern rather than a textual perspective as shaping the structure of the book. Lambrecht who, also correctly, sees the importance of the idea of progressive recapitulation in this book, presents a structure that does not fully respect the text. Tavo sees the weakness in these attempts and rightly insists that the oral-auditory setting of the text is important as the book is meant to be read liturgically (1:4, the first macarism, calls for this, though we must not forget the insistent nature of "Write what you see" in 1:11.19). Tavo also correctly insists on the climactic character of the New Jerusalem for this book. In the end, his attempt at structure ends up as somewhat "subjective" because a rigorous study of the entire text is missing. This does not affect his overall exegesis since he follows closely the areas of general consensus as regards

structure and the insights of the authors he relies on - and his own - are important in themselves.

The rest of the book is essentially an exegetical study of the five major “ecclesial” passages in the Apocalypse viz., (i) The material in Rev 1-3 and especially 2-3, (ii) The two images, 144,000 and the “great multitude.” in Ch 7, (iii) The 7 images used to describe the church in Rev 11, (iv) The Woman clothed with the sun, “the great sign” of Rev 12 and (v) the final eschatological imagery of city and bride in Rev 21-22. Tavo carefully exegetes each passage and then, in the conclusion, convincingly shows the continuity that runs between them all, from the seven churches to the New Jerusalem.

In Chapter 3 Tavo begins his exegetical work proper. He notes that this is a pastoral letter and so the entire work has in mind the pastoral concern for these seven churches in Asia. At the same time the number seven has a figurative meaning in that while each embodies the entire church the number seven indicates that the universal church is intended.

His study of the doxology of 1:5b-6 leads him to consider the love terminology of this text. He stresses two factors. Firstly, when Jesus is the subject of these love verbs (*agapan* and *philein*) the object of his love is always the church. Secondly, love (*agape*) is both a consequence of and the response to Jesus’ love. In this way he points to the relationship of Christ and the church as fundamental to this book. Jesus gave his blood, his life, to free the church from sin. Christians are also “kings” and so are called to reign as Jesus did, by self donation not power. Looking at 1:9 he discovers that the kingdom only comes by enduring through “tribulation.” The text here introduces a term (tribulation) that is important throughout the book.

Examining the situation of the seven churches of Rev 2-3 carefully, he finds that two things stand out. To begin with, the churches are most challenged by false teaching and evil works. Next, the only way to resist this is to cling to the “first works.” This is core. The works of Christ (2:26) and those of his opponents (Nicolaitans, etc) are incompatible. The latter separate Christians from Christ while the “works of Christ” unite Christians to him. Chief among

these, following Charles, he sees the “first works”, namely love, faith, service and endurance (2:19). The ones who keep these works are identified as those conquering (ho nikon) and it is to these that the final victory will be given. This consists essentially in “the enjoyment of God’s covenantal presence.”

The two well known images of the Church that appear at the time of the Day of the Lord in the sixth seal are studied next in chapter four. These are: the 144,000 sealed and the great multitude (7:1-17). The 144,000 represent the church on earth being prepared for the great tribulation by being sealed [with the names of Christ and God as they follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (14:1.4)]. The great tribulation, we will discover, is the warfare unleashed when the Dragon is cast from heaven to earth by Christ’s Paschal mystery (12:9).

The sealed are those who are “conquering” with God’s help or protection here on earth. The “great multitude” presents a later stage in the existence of this group. It refers to those who “come out” of the great tribulation. These are those who actually conquer. They do this through their relationship with the risen Christ by “washing their robes and whitening them in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). The actions of the two groups are, so to speak, contemporaneous, the one group constantly emerging from the other. This will continue until the New Jerusalem has completely descended. These images are perhaps hinted at in the terms *ecclesia militans ac triumphans*. The church here is seen more explicitly as a universal church.

Chapter five takes up again the story of an earthly and heavenly conquering church, sealed and protected, experiencing the great tribulation but it does this in the complicated ecclesial imagery of Rev 11:1-13. Tavo identifies no less than seven images of the Church here. The church is a worshipping church presented as (i) Temple, altar and worshippers. Its outer court (ii) is trampled by the nations, together with (iii) the Holy City, showing that the church is victim to the great tribulation, clearly implied but never explicitly mentioned.

The images here show a community that is spiritually protected as far as its worship goes. This life of worship cannot be touched even as it suffers physically. This will be the case as long as the temple and city are imbued with

the first works and so maintain their relationship with Christ, their crucified Lord. The other four images are those of the two prophets who are also two witnesses, the two olive trees and the two lampstands. The prophetic task of witnessing to their enemies, the nations, by the church leads to death but this, as in the case of Christ, leads to resurrection. The church bears witness to the nations. It does this by calling them to repentance. In the war stirred up by the beast from the abyss, they are killed but their death leads, ironically, to their greatest success in bringing about conversion. It was also through death that Christ conquered. Like him, Christians can conquer even when conquered.

Though the church in Rev 11 is essentially a community that is worshipping (temple, altar, worshippers) and prophetic (two witnesses, two prophets), the kingly and priestly aspect of the church is also alluded to here with the images of the two olive trees and two lampstands which adapts Zech 4 to this book. The witnessing community is one whose life of worship is maintained by its priestly and kingly life, ensuring that the worship is continued.

The theme of the great tribulation culminates in Rev 12, which Tavo studies in chapter six. Here we see that the primordial battle, the *urkampf*, is between Christ and Satan. Modern scholarship agrees that the woman is a collectivity. Scholarship identifies four possibilities for this collectivity: (i) The Church of the OT and NT (ii) The Christian Church (iii) The Church of the OT (iv) The Church and Mary. Tavo argues for (i). The community, seen in the figure of the woman clothed with the sun, is caught in the midst of this “tribulation.” Rev 12 finally reveals the horror of the “great tribulation” clearly. It is the battle between the Messiah, child of the woman, and Satan, the great fiery dragon.

However, the battle has been “fought and won” – by Christ. He shares this victory with the “woman,” 12:11. The birth of the child, the Paschal mystery, casts Satan out of heaven. Unable to harm the “woman” who is protected (as in Rev 11) the snake then makes war on “the rest of her seed.” Taking up the task of the two witnesses, these witnesses to Jesus are, in fact, able to conquer the dragon through the blood of Jesus, his Paschal Mystery. The themes of Rev 7 and 11 are here being repeated in different imagery. The tribulation

is limited and this limitation is shown in the images of 3 ½, 42 months and 1260 days, the period allowed for the tribulation. As we see, the theme of conquering, so important in cc 2-3, is key here also.

The seventh and last chapter (before the conclusion) takes up the final major set of ecclesial notions in the book: 21:1-22:5, the New Jerusalem. Tavo subjects this final passage to a close exegesis following his declared method and in close dialogue with modern scholarship. The tribulation is no more here. (Satan and his allies have been cast into the Lake of Fire). This is the post 3½ period. The woman of Rev 12 is seen here again but now she is a heavenly city and the bride and wife of the Lamb. The earthly church, the 7 churches, the 7 lampstands, or, more specifically, those in these churches who have conquered, are found again here. Those – and only those – who have conquered now share the bridal reality. Those conquering are the ones who have clung to the first works, the relationship with Christ, through thick and thin. The community of the redeemed consists of those who are in a relationship with Christ that is expressed in terms of conjugal intimacy.

This is how the covenant presence of God, promised in all the letters, is made present to the community. I would have liked to see a fuller treatment of Rev 3:12 where Christ indicates himself as the link between conquering and becoming the New Jerusalem. Both the seven churches and the final city are the work of him who is both “husband and builder” (Isa 54:5).

In his “General Conclusions” he stresses the importance of a “synoptic” view of his text, such as he has here attempted. In the summary he attempts to bring out what is common in all the narratives, together with what is new in each. Tavo wraps up by reminding us of some of the major themes that have emerged from his research: (i) the Paschal Mystery: Rev 12 shows the victory of Christ over Satan, from this victory come all others (ii) The Great Tribulation, the great suffering the church must endure. Its satanic origin is seen clearly in Rev 12. (iii) The church during the interim period of 3 ½, the intermediate time-span of the church age. (iv). The conquering church. This is what the seer - and Christ - seeks. This worshipping, prophetic, and conquering church eventuates in the New Jerusalem (v) His actual concern for the seven churches in Asia provides a pastoral rationale for all.

A major strength of this thesis is that Tavo explains the Apocalypse through the Apocalypse, not, as often happens, by recourse to other books (and theologies) of the NT. Basing himself on the text of the Apocalypse and its wider intertextuality, he clearly explains each of the five “ecclesial” texts that he takes up, dealing thus with the major passages that impinge on the ecclesiology of this book. Notable omissions are: 6:9-11, the souls under the altar; 14:1-5, the 144,000 who follow the Lamb wherever he goes (though it gets a mention in dealing with Rev 7); 15:1-8, the song of the conquerors by the “conquered” sea and the seven beatitudes. Arguably, however, his treatment of the major passages has set the scene for the exegesis of these passages also.

The stage is now set for a fuller study of the idea of conquering, especially conquering as the church’s relationship with Christ. The relationship is expressed covenantally/nuptially at the end of the book. The nuptial significance of each major passage, culminating in the final vision that interprets the whole work (and all of history) as the marriage of the Lamb, calls for further study. This thesis is fine achievement and gives us a text essential for any serious library on the Apocalypse. Hopefully we will hear much more, both exegetical and popular, from Tavo.

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Gender Based Violence in the Pacific

Dr. Jenny Te Paa Daniel

Rethinking Mission & Theology in the Pacific

Dr. Sr. Malia Keiti Ann Kanongata'a

Same Sex Marriage

Rev. Dr. Afereti Uili

Towards a Unifying Principle for the Bible:

A Prolegomena on Pacific Hermeneutics

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Book Review :

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Reviewed by Rev. Fr. Dr. Donal McIlraith